

*The New
Humpty-Dumpty*

By DANIEL CHAUCER

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THE NEW HUMPTY-DUMPTY

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE SIMPLE LIFE LIMITED

THE NEW ♀ ♀ ♀
HUMPTY-DUMPTY
BY DANIEL CHAUCER,

[Ford Madox Ford's

" There be summer queens and dukes of a day,
But the heart of another is a dark forest."

Tamboy.

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To
GEORGE PLUMPTON McCULLOCH

MY DEAR GEORGE,

You will remember that some years ago, on a cool morning, we set out to walk some twenty miles from Vila di Goya into the Gallegos District of Galizia. You will not remember that I was in a flaming temper with you, because I did not tell you so. But you may keep still in your mind the fact that I had accompanied you into that valley of desolation and pink dust because you had told me that it contained not only the tin, cobalt, and petroleum for which you were searching, but also the descendants of a semi-mythical stud-bull that you called Le Gran Vasco. That had been my sole motive for coming to the infernally dusty mountains in which you now reside and render hideous with your factories. And then, when I had reached Vila di Goya intent on seeing whether I could not improve my own stud-herd at Warley with some of the blood of that monster, I discovered that the Gran Vasco was not a bull, but a beastly bad painter—the only painter of your country of adoption. You only considered it a joke, and hardly apologised. . .

Well, in the heat of the noontide we sat under a rock and ate that infernal blue cheese that tastes like the smell of cats, and drank the infernal blue wine that is a mixture of warm leather and onion juice, and the plough-oxen of old Pompone Dedi were breathing down our backs, and the sea at the bottom of the valley was the colour of a blue meat-tin. And then you said:

“They’re putting up a statue to Sergius Mihailovitch in

the Square at Flores . . . By Jove, why you don't write a life of old Mac and call it the Dark Forest he was always talking about, I can't see ! ”

So here is the story of our friend, and I call it “ The Dark Forest.” Mr. Lane, however, insists on re-christening it “ The New Humpty-Dumpty.” Mr. Lane is without doubt wise. He is certainly tyrannical, and I am only a breeder of shorthorns writing to pass the time. At any rate, from your region of pink rocks, pink dust, blue cheese blue wine, and the distant sea that resembles a meat-tin, take a glimpse into this account of the pilgrimage of our good Mac—into the Dark Forest.

Yours,

D. C.

PART I

The New Humpty Dumpty

I

LORD ALDINGTON had been nagging at his wife during all the first two acts of the opera. That was why, during the pause, she had observed the foreign fashion and was walking round the foyer amongst crowds of cosmopolitan and mostly unpresentable people. Normally, Lady Aldington would have done nothing of the sort. She was as English as any woman could possibly be, even though she undoubtedly kept a thing so foreign as a *salon*. And, passing amongst all that crowd of foreigners who were all dark and who presented, nearly all of them, the appearance either of financiers with too many diamonds and too much linen, or of adventurers the state of whose linen showed that they hadn't got enough and that they possessed no diamonds at all, Lady Aldington, with her highly trained aspect and her *tout ensemble* of a high blondness, presented all that she ever did present to the world in the way of emotions of discomfort. She had attempted to escape as it were from the British brutality of her husband, and she found herself in a place where all the voices were raised too loud. That was the main point about it—that and the air of stuffiness that all these people conveyed to her. She uttered the traditional British phrase: "Why can't they open a window?" and then she turned her tall, thin body in its dress of grey silk slightly to one side, to pass between a Russian prince,

whose hair was too highly oiled, and a Frankfort financier who had no hair at all. Her husband, who was six foot high, forty inches round the chest, and had a disagreeable heavy fair face, was unable to get through between the two foreigners. Thus Lady Aldington passed on alone. It was as if the crowd, which appeared to mass itself round the refreshment bars, where beer and odd-looking messes upon little saucers had by their aspect increased Lady Aldington's feeling of discomfort—it was as if the crowd stopped suddenly, and she found herself in an almost empty corridor with square high pillars, walls covered with bluish mirrors, and red strips of velvet carpet underfoot. And suddenly her ladyship shivered. A voice had said :

“ I tell you, Hanne, there's no such thing as rice. Look at you and look at me.”

There stood before her—and just before a seat of grey velvet towards which Lady Aldington was making her way—there stood before her two beings unmistakably belonging to that country all of whose inhabitants regard the inhabitants of all other countries as something resembling niggers. The male wore dusty cycling stockings which showed that he must have been rickety in his youth, a tweed suit of grey that still showed the dust of the road. The little, dark woman had a thin, cheap blouse of pink linen, and a cycling skirt that heavy rain had shrunk till that too exhibited the fact that her thin legs were slightly bandy. She wriggled her small bowed shoulder-blades uncomfortably.

“ I don't fancy,” he added, “ that anyone would imagine we had ever seen Camden Town.”

They had obviously been cycling well and truly, for at this point his eyes fell upon Lady Aldington just as he was wiping his brows with a handkerchief that resembled an oil rag. They were eyes of a singularly piercing and a singularly foreign black, and the lashes, that were actually

coated with the dust of the road, gave them an odd touch of greyness. And the curled-up, black moustache, too, was thick with dust, so that he resembled nothing so much as a small French barber at whom had been thrown a bag of flour.

Losing for a moment her intense physical and mental discomfort now that she was out of the immediate pressure of other people's bodies, Lady Aldington was standing perfectly still, looking down at the red velvet carpet that ran straight and brilliant beside the closed doors of the boxes. She had dressed because they had been dining with the Nugent-Beaumonts at the Rose. And it was part of her discomfort that she felt that her dress was torn half off her back. It was not, though in that year skirts were very full and trained. She had managed to get through somehow, so that all the little flounces of grey silk were intact and she shimmered. Indeed, with her brilliantly fair hair trained down over her ears, her pink and white skin, her delicately aquiline nose, her slightly severe features and the clear lines of her lips, the Lady Aldington, with her full skirt and its many little flounces spreading out from her waist—this figure of blondness, delicate shot silk, and slightly descending bare white shoulders suggested—as the fashions of that year were meant to suggest—a lady of the 'forties. She was wondering if she could possibly put up with her husband for another year, and she stood perfectly still.

The voices reached her ears, but they did not really penetrate to her intelligence. She had forgotten the two cockneys, and she was standing with her side-face to them.

"These foreigners do get themselves up to look like us!" the man was saying. "Look at that piece of goods! Wouldn't you say that she was English? Who'd think this was Wiesbaden?"

"Oh, she's not English," the woman was saying. "She doesn't understand what we say."

"Now, you make a note of this, Hanne," the man continued, "if I forget to put it down in my ethnological notebook. That woman may be of any old nation. She may be Russian or German or French or Spanish. But the type comes true. It's breeding does it, and feeding does it. Look at the way the head's put on ; look at the white flesh of the shoulders."

It was at this moment that the Lady Aldington began to come to a sense of the place she was in. She was deciding that she must pardon her husband once again. She was aware that the cockney man was saying :

"Don't you remember, Hanne, how Professor Hufnagel says in 'Das Ewig Menschliche' . . . 'Except for wide generalisation there is no such thing as Race. There are only Type and Environment. Cornelia of the Gracchi exactly resembled in Type the late Countess von Warschau, who was a Pole, and as equally resembled the Duchess de Dinont, whose mother was an Englishwoman, and whose father was French with an Italian mother.' . . . Now, look at that woman in front of us, Hanne ! Look at her eyes, look at her nose ! Look at her shoulder-blades ! Some women's shoulders when you see them you want to smack . . ."

Lady Aldington wondered vaguely what woman they were talking of, and then she heard a voice say in an undertone :

"My friend Pett, that is Lady Aldington."

And she was dimly aware, out of the corners of her eyes, of yet another personality, apparently in evening dress, who was sitting on the seat that these two people had masked. She turned her back slowly upon them, and slowly and coldly she moved away. And she heard the voice of the cockney exclaiming :

"Comrade M. ! Who'd have thought of seeing you here, and in these togs !"

Lord Aldington was bearing down upon her fast. His heavy face was full of a malicious gloom. But, looking over her shoulder, he exclaimed :

“Hallo ! there’s Count Macdonald. I must introduce you to him when he has done talking to his friend.” He added, “He is the sort of person that you would get on with.”

And Lady Aldington knew that that was intended for another insult.

II

GEORGE FAWKENHURST, third baron Aldington, was one of those unfortunate persons whom everybody called a brute. Everybody without exception. There was not even one of the fourteen or fifteen maid-servants at Leicester House or at Aldington Towers who had a single good word to say for their master. Heavy, hairy, and untidy, he carried himself with a slouch, and he had enormous hands. At Harrow he hadn't made a friend ; from Oxford he had been sent down for ill-treatment to a cat. This animal he had put into a barrel, setting half a dozen young terriers upon it in order to train them to face the badger. He just escaped imprisonment. From the Guards he was requested to resign after he had been with his regiment in the perfunctory service that was at that time demanded of this arm of H.M.'s service. He caused so many cases of insubordination that even that regiment could find no use for him. It was just that he was a brute.

It was in the blood, it was in the tradition. For centuries in the Vale of York, where they have been small landowners, his family had been known as the False Fawkenhursts. This was not so much because they did not keep their word as because no one would ever have thought of extracting a promise from any member of the family. Then, about sixty years before, George Fawkenhurst's grandfather James had married a lady who brought him a considerable amount of land in the Cleveland district.

Within a year of this marriage, iron in great quantity had been discovered upon this land. From that the peerage had come, James, first baron, having purchased it by contributing something over £30,000 to the party funds. Thus was established the great Whig house of Aldington. James Fawkenhurst had lived to a great age. In habits and behaviour he had been a little better than one of his own farm-servants. But, having been a man of a violent humour, he had beaten and shouted at his son and heir, the second baron, until William Fawkenhurst, George's father, had been nothing but a sad and disagreeable shadow. William had married Julia Saxwyndholm, who brought with her the estate of Aldington Towers, and it was from this estate that old James Fawkenhurst chose to take his title, which did not come to him until his son William had been married a year or so. Aldington Towers was an estate of about four thousand acres in East Sussex, perhaps six miles north of Battle. George's father had faded disagreeably out of existence—he died of dropsy, without ever having had the fun of drinking hard, when George himself had been, perhaps, thirteen, and was away at Harrow. When George was eighteen, the iron upon the Cleveland land had given out, utterly and suddenly. And none of the Fawkenhursts had been a saver. They had lived to the tune of £40,000 a year for fifty years, and had got precious little to show for their money. George Fawkenhurst found himself thus, when he came of age, forced to depend upon the rents from the Aldington Towers estate, from the original Fawkenhurst land in the Vale of York, and the useless lands of his grandmother in the Cleveland district. Thus he was at liberty to consider himself dismally poor, since his mother, who still lived, had a jointure to be paid her that had been calculated in the days when the Fawkenhursts were still drawing their £40,000 a year from iron.

Why Emily Duminy should have fallen in love with Lord Aldington was simply one of the mysteries of sex attraction. She fell in love with him when she was twenty ; she married him when she was twenty-one, and with a cruel cynicism her husband had destroyed all her illusions by the time she was aged twenty-one years and one week. And within six months Emily was ready to acknowledge that when everyone in the world had besought her not to make this match, everyone in the world had been perfectly right. By the time she was twenty-three she had resolutely cut down the allowance that she made her husband to a very few thousands a year. Emily Duminy had been the richest woman in England, and she still was. The grand-daughter and only surviving descendant of James, eleventh Duke of Kintyre, Dijon, and Batalha, her mother Lady Mary Buchanan had married a lieutenant in the French navy. The Duke had detested his only child for this marriage, and, Lieutenant Duminy turning out a very bad hat indeed, the Duke had left the daughter to starve on £500 a year in a villa at Twickenham. But upon the death of Lady Mary the Duke had taken his grand-daughter away from the High School, where she was getting her education. He had done his very best to spoil her. He detested his heir almost more than he detested the rest of mankind, and he was not a very amiable character. Thus, impoverishing the entailed estates as much as he could, the Duke had done his best to build up an immense fortune for his grand-daughter. No one knew exactly how large this fortune was. The Lady Aldington had paid succession duty on something under a million. That the newspapers, of course, reported. But, in addition, he was known to have settled a hundred thousand upon her at her marriage. At that date he had not been pleased with her, and he had declared that he was going to see how the marriage turned out before he made over any more of his "brass" to

Emily. To his delight, the marriage turned out thoroughly badly. And by the time she had been twenty-five Emily had been able to make her grandfather certain that she was quite able to keep all her money out of her husband's clutches. It was at that date that her grandfather, in order to avoid the death duties, had made over to her what rumour estimated as one-fifth of the city of Glasgow, half of a Scotch county, or the whole of three London slum districts. By the time she was twenty-seven Emily had been able to assure her grandfather that she would never have any children by her husband. And in his delight at the thought that none of his money would ever go into the pockets of a descendant of Aldington's, the Duke made over to her the whole of the lands of she Duchy of Batalha. This was an enormous stretch of rather barren territory in the north of the republic of Galizia. It contained, however, several very valuable mines of tin, silver, and cobalt. This, the third of His Grace's duchies, was not a matter of tail male, but would pass along with the title itself to Emily.

No doubt the hard discipline of fate prevented the Lady Aldington from becoming finally spoiled. In insisting on marrying Aldington she had behaved like a spoiled child ; but by disillusioning her so suddenly and completely—within a week of their marriage—Aldington had done her character all the good in the world. With a perfectly callous frankness, Aldington at that date had asked her for a business interview. It had been at Taormina. He had said that he kept several establishments ; that he had married Emily only to obtain money to keep these going, and he wanted to know what arrangements she was ready to make to that end. He had made the announcement without preface, and he left it without apology, standing with his heavy slouch. The shadows of the vines on the broad pergola had fallen all over him ; the sky had been a hard and dazzling blue, the sea a blue deeper, darker and

more dazzling, beside and below them. She had had to get used to it.

She had consulted his mother, who was still alive, six months later. And the dowager Lady Aldington could only beg her not to let her son have too much money or he would go to the devil, and not to cut him off altogether or he would go to the devil still sooner. She had consulted her grandfather, and he had given her exactly the same advice. So she had taken her line.

As things were, she was understood to have some "hold" over her husband. In the early days he had once or twice behaved outrageously to her in public places. Once he had insisted on introducing an obviously impossible woman to her on the lawn at Ascot. But rather suddenly all that had stopped. About that time Aldington had been seen going about with an unusually shaken appearance, and he had been observed to be drinking rather more whisky than usual at his clubs. Reggie Windus, who had been passing the door of Leicester House on the Saturday after Ascot, had seen a police-sergeant going down the steps, and positively Lady Aldington had been closing the front door upon him.

Leicester House with its immense gardens stands in the little cul-de-sac that turns off Forbes Square, S.W., so that how Reggie Windus could have been passing the house was not very evident to his friends; nor did it seem in the least likely that Lady Aldington, the most coldly correct of women, would ever have been near her front door. But Windus stuck to his story, and there it was. He even said, to account for his having passed the door, that the Pekingese spaniel that he had been taking for a walk to oblige Lady Hilary Cholmely had run down the cul-de-sac and, attracted by some delectable odour on the garden railings of Leicester House, had to be fetched and forcibly carried off by Reggie himself.

But the Aldingtons at all social functions formed one of the extremely model couples of which so many are to be found in London. Except to teas, Lady Aldington never went out alone, and even to many teas her husband accompanied her. He was generally to be found somewhere not very far from her chair, and, if he had not very often anything to say, that also was considered to be agreeable, since what he said whenever he did speak was invariably in the nature of a grumble against somebody or something. It was as if Lord Aldington was the most bitterly oppressed individual of a bitterly oppressed class. The Aldingtons spent from Easter to July in London, from July till October they were at Aldington Towers. In October they moved to Fawkenhurst for the shooting. A fortnight before and a week after Christmas they spent in London again, and then they moved off to Egypt until a week before Easter. This week they spent always in their yacht in the harbour of the city of Batalha, the northernmost of the three cities that the republic of Galizia contained. In the city of Batalha there was no hotel fit for the Aldingtons, and there was always smallpox. It is exceedingly likely that the large estates of Lady Aldington as Duchess de Batalha would have been confiscated when the republic had been proclaimed in 1909. They would certainly have been confiscated had the Galizian Ministry not very much desired recognition by the Government of Great Britain. As it was, the dictator passed a decree that on account of the brilliant services of the Duchess and her ancestors to the economic and political welfare of the republic of Galizia—(*Li servizi insignanti al causa de la libertad y economismo Galiziana*)—the estates of the Duchess and her heirs should be exempted from the penalties that fell upon all monarchical landowners. Indeed, it might well be said that the old Duke of Kintyre had not been a monarchist and had made for Galizia all the wealth that that impoverished

country contained. In the whole of it elsewhere there was not to be seen a factory chimney. But, lying in the harbour of Batalha, Lady Aldington from the deck of her yacht could observe no less than nine. And in the remainder of the rocky province there were exactly fourteen more. In Batalha itself there was even an electric tramway, and, for what it was worth, a water supply and a drainage system, so that Galizians were accustomed to speak of the city of Batalha as *le Chicago del Sude*—the Chicago of the South. Nay, in Batalha there was even a hospital with German doctors, and two Protestant churches, the one Scotch Episcopal for the benefit of the superintendants of the mines, and the other Primitive Methodist for the benefit of the Cornish miners, of whom the province of Batalha boasted a population of nearly three thousand. All these things were the property, or were supported by, the Lady Aldington, and they were all under the general superintendence of a Scotchman called Macdonald. This gentleman was known as *le rey de Batalha*—the King of the Province.

With the regularity of the hands of a clock the Aldingtons had pursued this circular itinerary for seven years—London, Aldington Towers, Fawkenhurst, London, Egypt and then Batalha. But three years before Aldington himself had developed stomach troubles. So, at the recommendation of Sir Chrested Joins, they had managed to squeeze three weeks at Wiesbaden into their yearly round. Lady Aldington herself suffered from no troubles of any physical kind.

She was thirty-one. She stood five foot nine in her stockinged feet. She rode ten stone, and she rode it for an hour and a half every morning of the year, wet or fine. She was called a hard woman, and she had few preoccupations in life except that she desired to be able to classify her husband's attacks of bad temper and insubordination. She put these down as a rule to ill health. Thus she dis-

covered that Aldington never attended a sitting or voted in the House of Lords without on the next day behaving like a sulky wild beast with criminal leanings. She was, therefore, fairly certain that this came from the fact that the Upper Chamber had a particularly bad atmosphere, and that its wine list contained the name of one really good wine—a Pontet Canet of which Aldington was particularly fond. Thus four years before she had got her husband to pair with a Tory peer who had become incapable of putting in an appearance through confirmed and premature senile decay.

It was part of Aldington's disagreeable eccentricities that he obstinately insisted on remaining a Whig. He did not even follow the Marquis of Hartington into the Unionist fold. Nay, he had once, for a period of two months, held an inferior office in a Liberal Ministry; but two months after the general election he had had to resign. Fourteen cottages on the Fawkenhurst estate had been peremptorily closed by the local sanitary authority, and the Liberal Government being engaged at that time in promoting a bill for the housing of the poor, Lord Aldington's name, however short the party might be of peers, was held not to decorate the roll of the ministry. Indeed, it was quite as disagreeable to the Liberals to have Lord Aldington for a supporter as it was to the Tories that he should vote against them.

III

THEY had been at Wiesbaden exactly twenty days and they were to leave for Aldington Towers on the next day but one. On the following day Lady Aldington was going over to Nauheim to lunch with her aunt, Mrs. Crewkerne, who was taking the waters there. And suddenly, whilst her husband was bearing down upon her over the red velvet carpet from out of the crowd that surrounded the bars, it occurred to Lady Aldington that her husband for the last three years had always had one of his fits of bad temper on the twentieth day of their stay at Wiesbaden. Undoubtedly the curative waters did something to his liver. She replied to him :

"I do not think I feel like being introduced to anyone at this moment."

But Aldington positively caught hold of her elbow. His face had a malicious grin that showed ugly teeth, discoloured by excessive smoking.

"I tell you the man is an idiot," he said ; "come and be introduced to him. You can't tell he won't be your last and dearest love."

Lady Aldington moved slowly round, and faced once more the cockney and his wife. Of the man they were speaking to she could perceive only the point of a patent leather shoe, because he was sitting down upon the grey velvet seat. And suddenly Lady Aldington felt contented. She imagined—nay, she was certain that she had discovered another cause for one of her husband's bad days, and if she knew the

cause she could put up with it. For the point was that she had to keep Aldington in order. She could be deaf to his brutal speeches ; she did not like them, but she could put up with them. But she was afraid—she was always afraid, that there would come an extended period of time in which he would defy her. Then she would have but one remedy, and a remedy that she could only apply once. She would have to have him imprisoned. He forged her cheques from time to time. But for the moment she felt almost happy.

Aldington was really pulling her down the slightly sloping velvet carpet. A little in advance of her he cannoned against the two cockneys, as a billiard ball might do, and they fled apart to left and to right. Lady Aldington heard his rough voice exclaim :

“ I want to introduce you to my wife, Macdonald.”

And then : “ Count Macdonald, Lady Aldington.”

She was so occupied in her mind with the problem of her husband's health that she hardly raised her eyes to the young man's face. She had the impression that he was very tall, and that his dress clothes fitted him quite well, which she wouldn't have expected of anyone who was a friend of the two cockneys. She murmured the indistinct sounds—the little meaningless whispers that, in England, betoken pleasure at making a new acquaintance. Then she asked :

“ Are you taking the waters ? Do you find that they affect your temper ? ”

She became still more aware of the great height of the man when she observed that he appeared to be slightly bending his knees in order to come within range of her ear. She became aware, too, that he was making slight lateral gestures with his long and nervous hands ; and she bowed minutely, first to the right to the cockney man and then to his wife upon her left, for she realised that, in a correctly

English manner, Count Macdonald was effecting an introduction. She realised also that the name of these people was Pett, and that Count Macdonald had the slightest possible suspicion, for all the singular Englishness in his appearance, of a foreign accent. It was just that he pronounced his words too well—he pronounced them as well as Lady Aldington herself did, and she knew that she was regarded as pedantic. And then he said :

“ No ; I’m in attendance on the Grand Duke, in order to cement our reconciliation.”

And at that moment the cockney man entered the conversation.

“ The Wiesbaden waters,” he said, “ contain sulphur, strontium, and barytes. The bath doctors are always claiming that they find radium, too. You’ll find about as much radium in a penny packet of Epsom salts.”

There was about all his vowels the faint tinge of the jargon of West Essex. Thus if he did not actually say “ abaht ” and “ all-wise,” he at least suggested those sounds. His voice, however, had a slightly aggressive and slightly authoritative ring, and then his wife spoke.

“ Your ladyship needn’t,” she said, “ that is to say, no one really need feel distress if their tempers are slightly altered by the action of the waters—if they’re following the régime.”

“ It’s very kind of you,” Lady Aldington said. “ My temper is all right, thank you.”

And then Aldington put in : “ It’s me she means. We’ve been behaving like cat and dog all the evening.”

Mr. Pett giggled. But his wife looked seriously at the peer. She had the air of a small pink sparrow who might be thoughtfully considering the case of a half-bred Newfoundland.

“ Oh, you needn’t be concerned,” she said. “ It won’t last. People are rather morbid nowadays, and they’re

apt to think that temporary depressions are becoming incorporated into their characters. But it isn't so in this case. At least, I have never heard of any ill resulting from the use of these waters. There are, of course, baths that can only be used with extreme caution."

Aldington stuck his hands into his trousers' pockets; he leaned back the upper part of his body, and guffawed. And then a little bell rang. Macdonald moved slightly forward, bowing minutely to Lady Aldington.

"I am afraid that means," he said, "that I must get back to the Grand Duke." He muttered some more words in which "delighted" and "acquaintance" could faintly be distinguished; and then he slipped between Lady Aldington and Mr. Pett, and sauntered towards the white door of a box.

Mr. Pett called jocularly after him: "Ain't the old Duke afraid you'll stick a dagger in his back?"

And then he continued to Lady Aldington: "Used to be a first-class anarchist in the old Houndsditch days."

"He looks extraordinarily English," Lady Aldington said vaguely.

"Oh, he's as Russian as they make them," Mr. Pett answered. "His ancestors went over to Russia in the time of Peter the Great. But if you'd read my travel notes in the *Daily Herald* you'd have seen how I proved that they don't turn out any Russians or French or Germans or niggers any more. The whole world's just engaged in manufacturing middle-class Englishmen, whether it's me or you, or Mrs. Pett, or your husband, or the man I bought Ansichtskarten of this morning. He looked exactly like any English clerk, and he thought like any English clerk from what I could gather in conversation with him. The same with the porter at the hotel where we're stopping. He's a nigger, but he ought to have been born in Acton." Mr. Pett pronounced it Ecton.

Lady Aldington said : " That's very interesting, now."

" It means," Mrs. Pett said, " that we're gradually approaching to a unity of mankind. We're bringing the whole world to one standard. Then the brotherhood of man will begin."

" When we're all English middle-class ? " Lady Aldington asked.

" Your ladyship means lower middle-class," Mr. Pett said.

" Well, I suppose I do," Lady Aldington conceded amiably.

IV

LADY ALDINGTON was on the platform waiting for a train that was to take her to Nauheim. She was going to spend the day with her aunt, Mrs. Crewkerne, a disagreeable old lady, who was troubled with her heart. She had written very minutely to Emily with the programme of her day of cures. Thus, Lady Aldington was to be at the hotel at a quarter to eleven. She might walk with her aunt to the baths, and then she might wait outside for half an hour, after which she would be permitted to walk back with Mrs. Crewkerne to the hotel. The cure, Mrs. Crewkerne wrote, was very severe. Thus, she would have to go to bed from a quarter-past eleven until one-fifteen. It would take her till half-past one to dress, so that Lady Aldington would be free to pay calls. She had better leave cards on Mrs. Sidney Trench, the wife of the Minister for Education, and on Lady Jane Wills, who was a particular friend of Mrs. Crewkerne's and would feel offended if Emily neglected her. There was also Baroness Sassonoff, the delightful lady they had met in Cairo three years before.

Lady Aldington was quite determined that she would not call upon either the wife of the Education Minister or Lady Jane Wills. But the thought of seeing the Baroness Sassonoff gave her some pleasure, and she determined, after she had taken a little walk in the park, that she would take her chance of finding that cosmopolitan lady at home.

Aldington, true to their tradition of presenting to the

world the aspect of a model couple, had sauntered down to the station with her. He wore a rough suit of light grey tweed which made him appear enormous, and a panama hat which gave him more than his usual aspect of untidiness. Lady Aldington wished that he had not, and he knew it. It was one of his ways of administering a pin-prick. They did not, however, speak a single word all the way along the ugly, broad, new streets until they reached the ugly, squat, new railway station with its aspect of being half music-hall and half prison. Lady Aldington managed to take her own ticket, for she could get as far as three or four words in German, and Aldington was able to get from an automatic machine the penny ticket that admitted him on to the platform. Then he went to the bookstall to buy for his wife a copy of the *Daily Mercury*, a journal which her ladyship cordially detested.

Lady Aldington was standing on the platform meditatively tapping the ground between her feet with the point of her parasol, and she was regarding the place where she was tapping, for a quick glance had shown her that there were upon the platform at least half a dozen people whose existence she did not want to acknowledge. She was wearing an immense hat of thin straw, with a single very long pheasant's feather buckled into it, so that, since it came down well over her ears, she was quite able to avoid anybody's glances. For the rest of her she had on a costume of white linen touched off about the shoulders and breast with passementerie work in pink. She had also a diaphanous cloak of ivory-coloured lace that fell from her shoulders right down to her feet. It was very hot weather that summer. And suddenly she heard a voice, with the slightest possible foreign intonation, saying :

" It is Lady Aldington, isn't it ? "

She had to look up, and then she smiled.

Count Macdonald was standing before her with his hat

off. He had in his left hand a truly enormous parcel of an irregular funnel shape, enveloped in white tissue paper. He waved the great object lightly in the air, and exclaimed :

"I'm taking these as a compliment from the Grand Duke to Madame Sassonoff in Bad-Nauheim ;" and then he added rather gaily, "I want to apologise immensely . . ."

"But there's nothing to apologise for, in taking flowers to Madame Sassonoff," Lady Aldington said. "I'd take some myself if I could find them on the road."

At that moment Aldington came up, waving as ostentatiously as he could the paper that he had bought. He knew that, much as his wife disliked reading it, she disliked other people to see her with it immensely more.

"Sassonoffs !" he said ; "are they at Nauheim ? If I'd known I would have come along."

"Well, come," Macdonald exclaimed sunnily. "We are both going to pay our respects, as it appears."

"Ah," Aldington said, with a grin that disclosed all his bad teeth beneath his ragged clipped moustache, "I knew you were birds of a feather."

"It looks as if your feathers were the same," Macdonald said, "if you want to call on Madame Sassonoff too."

"There you're wrong," his lordship answered. "I want to, but I want to meet your friends, the Petts, more." He added, "I'm going to meet them at the Pump Room in a quarter of an hour and motor them to Mainz."

"It's an odd taste," Macdonald said ; "but they're quite dear people."

Lord Aldington looked his wife straight in the eyes. "Mrs. Pett," he said, "reminds me of someone I know."

A small invincible shudder went all over Lady Aldington's tall white figure. Aldington grinned pantomimically, and at that moment the train wandered into the station with its genial air of not knowing exactly where it wanted to go.

It happened that the steps of a long car stopped just in

front of them. And Lord Aldington, taking each of them by a shoulder, fairly pushed them in. Macdonald found an empty compartment, into which he introduced Emily. He stood in the doorway.

"I don't in the least know," he said, "whether you want me with you?"

"Oh yes, come in," she said. "Sit down quickly so as to show that you are with me."

She indicated with her eyes the corridor behind him, and Macdonald perceived a man with a head covered with an immense growth of tawny hair flecked with white, and a great beard resembling a bird's nest. He was surveying Lady Aldington with his head bent down, his eyes looking beneath his brows as if he intended to butt her.

"Please don't look at him," Lady Aldington said. "*Please* don't! At the slightest encouragement he'll come in."

The man passed lingeringly onwards, the last Macdonald saw of him being his enormous calves, that were encased in grey worsted stockings.

"He might have chaperoned us, you know," Macdonald said.

"He might, of course," Lady Aldington said coolly; "but I want to ask you half a dozen things, and if he had come in we should have had to listen all the way to a rehearsal of his next speech, asking that the carriage of whisky by rail should be suppressed by law in Scotland."

"Oh, you know him, then?" Macdonald said.

"Of course I know him," Lady Aldington answered. "He is Dr. Farquhar, the member for the Mull of Cantyre."

"But how do you get to know such people?" Macdonald asked. "The welts of his boots must have been three inches broad. I thought he was just a substantial butterfly attracted by the flame."

"Oh no, he wasn't," Lady Aldington said; "if he'd been

that I could have managed to deal with him. He is an awful inheritance of my husband's Whig traditions. We're one of the great Whig Houses, you know."

Macdonald raised both his hands in a slight foreign gesture that might have been one of horror or it might have been mere pity.

"Oh, I know," he said; and then he asked, this time really commiseratingly, "It means that they're always with you?"

"Always," Lady Aldington said. And at that moment the train started smoothly.

"At any rate," Count Macdonald brought out, with a sigh, "we're on a holiday now. Let's make it as gay as we can."

Lady Aldington said: "I haven't the least objection."

A minute afterwards Macdonald leant forward and asked, with an air almost as if the question were slightly obscene:

"Are the Temperance Party always with you?"

"Oh," Lady Aldington said, "Dr. Farquhar isn't temperance. He drinks a great deal of whisky. I forget what his label is—I think it's the Nationalisation of Railways."

"But if," Macdonald said, "he wants the railways not to be allowed to transport whisky——"

"That," Lady Aldington replied, "is because he wants greater facilities for what he calls minerals."

"Isn't that soda water, in idiomatic English?" Macdonald asked.

"Only for waiters, I believe," Lady Aldington said.

Macdonald threw up his hands. "What a language!" he said. "What a country! What boots! What politicians! And Rome, you know, is really burning whilst Farquhar fiddles."

"Oh, but you know," Lady Aldington said, "he really has discovered that a glue factory, or a golosh factory, or a dynamite factory in Arbroath or Lochaber was hung up

for a whole week for want of coal, whilst the Scotch trains were delivering whisky. You may thank your lucky stars that you don't know what these tremendous discoveries are."

"Oh, but I do, I do," Macdonald said pitifully. "I have been through it all. Don't forget that I am a Russian. I've been an anarchist in Tottenham Court Road; I have been a member of the Fabian Society in Putney, S.W. I was one of the Milhiukoff, exiled deputies of the Duma at Sveaborg. Now I'm trying to save my soul—don't forget that I'm a countryman of the great and regretted Tolstoi—I am trying to save my soul by carrying flowers from the Grand Duke to Madame Sassonoff. No, don't on any account forget that I am a Russian."

"You know I don't in the least understand what you're talking about," Lady Aldington laughed.

"That's it," Macdonald said; and, leaning forward, he touched the lady upon her white knee with a gesture of earnest appeal. "That's exactly it. Let's have a jolly day's holiday. Let's talk about our sorrows to each other."

Lady Aldington laughed once more. "I'm perfectly ready to talk about mine," she said, "but you haven't let me get a word in, and I don't believe you will let me."

"Ah, that," Macdonald said, "is because my sorrows are so much greater than yours. Rome is burning, you know, whilst you're only troubled by Whigs. I know all about them. I knew the members of the first Duma. They were Marxists to a man." Macdonald broke off to look earnestly at Lady Aldington. "Did you ever meet a Marxist?"

"No, I never did," Lady Aldington said. "But I understand what it is."

"Oh, it's dreary . . . dreary," Macdonald commented. "No Whig was ever so desolatingly dreary or so

dearly opinionative. I could understand at once what you suffer in your procession. I am a great strong man, you're a weak woman. So that I can reckon it up pretty exactly. You suffer all your life exactly what I suffered with my colleagues at Sveaborg. I've exactly gauged your case, so that you need not do any more talking, though you've a lovely voice, if you'll let me say so. But you haven't got it in your bones that Rome is burning."

"You *are* quite sane?" Lady Aldington leaned forward to ask. "One likes to know, for I still don't understand a single word you say."

"That," Macdonald said, "is because I've got such a tremendous amount to say that I have to use one image to express twenty thousand ideas. That is the great trouble with all great thinkers. But, oh yes, I'm sane. I'm the only sane man whilst all Rome is burning. That is why the Grand Duke can't find anything better for me to do than carry bouquets to Madame Sassonoff." He looked reproachfully at Lady Aldington. "You might have realised that——"

"What?" Lady Aldington asked.

"That when a man of my power of thought is set by a Grand Duke to carry bouquets, it's because the Grand Duke is grand ducally afraid of his ideas. You *ought* to have seen that it makes me a very sane man indeed."

Lady Aldington leaned as far back on the white lace antimacassar of the foreign first-class carriage—she leant as far back as her large hat would let her. . . .

"I suppose I ought to say that all this strikes me as extremely odd. But it doesn't. You're exactly like a queer but not very unpleasant nightmare; you go on and on, and I have not the slightest idea of where you're going on to. But just go on! Only remember that I'm English as you're Russian."

"Well," Macdonald said, "I'm not going to bring the blush to your cheek."

"Oh, I can defend myself against that," Emily answered coolly. "What I meant to say was that no properly conducted English person understands even what an image is. You oughtn't really even to use a figure of speech."

Macdonald once more threw up his hands in dismay.

"Oh, you can go on," Lady Aldington comforted him. "Only do rehearse your woes in a language that I can understand one word in three of."

"Dear lady——" Macdonald said; and he remained for a moment lost in thought. Then he began:

"I was born in the month of April of the year 1872, in my ancestral domain of Potsdamskaia, in the government of Kieff. My distinguished ancestor, General Count Macdonald, was able to persuade the Empress Catherine of blessed memory that he was the legitimate king of Scotland. And that fact is inscribed upon our Charter of Nobility." Macdonald broke off to gaze at Lady Aldington. "I hope this biographic style is clear enough. Well . . . my first education was undertaken by tutors and tutoresses of various nationalities. I can remember most distinctly an English governess who was called Miss Pett. . . . In the year 1886 . . ."

Lady Aldington suddenly interrupted him with the words, "That reminds me that I meant to ask you who were your friends the Petts."

Macdonald held up his hand authoritatively. "Lady Aldington," he exclaimed, "you are about to listen to one of the most singular biographies ever related by a child of his age. And you interrupt me in order to ask who a person called Pett may be!"

"I don't really care about Pett," Lady Aldington said. "What I want to know is, who is the man's wife?"

"That," Macdonald said, "would have come out in the ordinary course of my story. Mr. Pett is the thinker who has most profoundly influenced my career."

"But——" Lady Aldington said,—

"Oh, I know," Macdonald said. "He called you Lidy Haldington. But that does not affect the quality of his thoughts. You have to adjust yourself to a new world. Rome, in fact, is burning. It has burnt off the initial 'h's' and the final 'g's' of your language. The very distinguished Mr. Pett, the product of your Education Act of 1870, is a school-master abroad. He is also a journalist, and he will probably be Conservative Prime Minister of your country—or, if not Pett, then someone like Pett. Pett's wife is Pett's cousin, a school-mistress and journalist, and to the two of them my excellent Miss Pett, who taught me the Lord's Prayer in English and the virtues of your late Queen Victoria—to these two the excellent Miss Pett stood in the relation of aunt. But the train is proceeding at the rate of twelve miles an hour towards our destination, and, if I am to finish my biography, I must now proceed with it. . . . In the year 1886 I proceeded to the University of Smolensk. . . ."

Slowly and smoothly the train rolled on beside high hills, covered with dark woods upon which the sun shone down. At a wayside station it appeared to wait for three-quarters of an hour for no particular reason. Then they were dragged slowly past a broad-spreading castle which was decorated with a great number of flags hanging from the peaked roofs. A number of maid-servants in caps and aprons were leaning over the green slopes of the glacis, conversing with a number of black brass-bound soldiers in the road below.

"My august sovereign," Macdonald said, "is visiting his august relatives in that castle. That is why the train was delayed three-quarters of an hour."

A man looking like a waiter, with narrow eyes and a foxy moustache, peered in at them from the corridor.

"That," Macdonald said, "is the chief of the Russian

detective police. The train was kept waiting to suit his convenience. He could have gone to Nauheim in ten minutes, in a motor-car. He's spying on us now."

Lady Aldington shuddered slightly.

"Disgusting?" Macdonald asked her. "Yes, of course it's disgusting. It's disgusting that an express train should be kept waiting for a detective, just as it's disgusting that you'll find yourself shadowed by dirty-looking Russians wherever you go in Nauheim till they find out who you are. That's because you're talking to a subject of my august sovereign. And that is why Rome is burning to the tune of those *mouchards*."

Then Macdonald continued the story of his life. Leaning forward, animated and giving the impression that he was not in the least in earnest, Macdonald was extremely fair, and his clothes, as Lady Aldington had already remarked, were just too well cut to let him be really English, of good tradition. His suit of blue serge had the frontal creases of the trousers so exceedingly stiffly marked that they appeared to be kept out by a whale-bone spring. His hands were large and long; they had the aspect of being cool and firm, and from time to time he used them to emphasize what he was saying. Lady Aldington was astonished that she did not find this disagreeable. His face would have been as bland as it was blonde if it had not been for the shape of his eyelids. His eyes were of a Scotch blue, but the lids, slightly narrow and running slightly upwards, gave Lady Aldington to understand that in this man there would be upon occasion a touch of a devil. It was a faint suggestion of black Scotch pride, of dark Tartar passion and cruelty, as well as the romantic self-containment of which both these races are capable. Lady Aldington could not exactly have put it into words. But once he broke off the account of the immigration of his soul amongst Russian revolutionists in London to say, gazing at her fingers:

"You English women have such beautiful hands!" And there was in the undertones of his voice such a quaver of longing that Lady Aldington felt as if he were devoting to her long fingers a passion that he could not respectfully address to her whole person. She leant back, all in white, surveying him through her eyelashes, and she listened. Only the curve of her long neck showed her pride not only of place but in every other thing. And that was involuntary. . . .

"I can't," Madame Sassonoff said, "I can't tell you whether he's 'quite,' unless you tell me, dear Lady Aldington, what 'quite' means."

"Well," Lady Aldington said, "I've been walking about with him all the morning and, as he's either enterprising or astonishingly simple, it looks as if we should be walking about together for the rest of the day. At least, he has announced his intention of calling for me at my aunt's hotel exactly at four o'clock, when my aunt goes to bed."

"Well, he is discreet, is Sergius Mihailovitch," Madame Sassonoff said. "You can rely upon him to be that."

"I don't know that I care," Emily said, "whether he is that or not. But I should like to know the other."

The Baroness chuckled deep in the throat of her round, dark personality. Her hotel room was filled with masses of bouquets that occupied borrowed vases on every article of furniture. Sergius Mihailovitch Macdonald had just left them to see if he could get for his Grand Duke a certain French novel that the censorship at Wiesbaden had cleared the bookshops of. The Baroness's plump hands were perpetually moving, and had an air of being extremely accomplished. She had upon each finger at least two large rings. Her income was said to exceed three million roubles, and the Czar himself was one of her trustees. And this imperial backing gave to Madame Sassonoff a recklessness

that a great many people found attractive. In spite of her immense wealth, she never entertained in the English sense of the word, because it was too much trouble. She lived in hotels, and yet she was never without a constant stream of pleased visitors. She was capriciously charitable. Once she gave a quarter of a million roubles to a fund for providing Paris coachmen with button-holes on the feast of the Assumption of the Virgin. She was in no way religious, not in the least superstitious, and she had no moral illusions of any kind.

"My dear," this lady answered Lady Aldington's last speech, "you never know when you won't want a man to be discreet, and I wouldn't, if I were you, be so crudely frank. What you implied just now was that although Sergius Mihailovitch may have been my lover, he would never be yours. But, quite apart from that having been insulting to me, it is a thing you never can tell."

Lady Aldington said irrelevantly: "My husband put me in his charge. That's generally considered . . ."

"My dear," the Baroness said, "*avec un mari comme le votre*—it would be generally considered a case for *des circonstances extenuantes*. A deucedly suspicious circumstance, in English."

"My dear," Emily said, "I don't think you in the least understand what Aldington wants."

"But I profess to understand what Aldington *is*," the Baroness answered. "You don't suppose we spent that six weeks in that hotel at Cairo together without my discovering what sort of a monster your husband is. . . . Unless he's changed in these three years?" she added interrogatively.

"Oh, he hasn't changed," Lady Aldington said, and she permitted before this foreigner just a shade of desolation to appear in her tone.

"And you haven't changed, and the world hasn't

changed, so that nothing has changed!" the Baroness said. "*Quelle misère!*"

"I don't know that I want anything changed," Lady Aldington said reflectively. "What should it change to?"

"Ah!" the Baroness said, "that is all very well; but even frozen mutton thaws in the end."

"I'm not a sheep," Lady Aldington said.

"No, but you are a lamb," Madame Sassonoff answered.

"I shall be thirty-one next week," Emily said, "and I can take care of myself."

"Oh, poor lamb! oh, poor lamb!" the Baroness said. "What is that that I perceive upon your head?"

Emily instinctively raised her hands towards her hat. But then she remembered that Madame Sassonoff in the Russian court was believed to have certain gifts that in Russian were called *sgaravoie*—as who should say, "the voices." For, every now and then, the Baroness would drop into a sort of trance. She would gaze before her and prophesy. As a rule she did not permit herself these excursions when English women were present in her drawing-room, for it was apt to render them uncomfortable. Nevertheless, the two ladies having lived in some intimacy at Cairo, Emily had once or twice witnessed such a manifestation on her friend's part—more particularly on one occasion, when a member of the imperial family had been passing through Egypt and had called on the Baroness.

Madame Sassonoff continued to gaze at the buckle of old paste that secured the large feather in her guest's hat. And in the silence Lady Aldington was vaguely wondering whether this scintillating object just above the Baroness's line of vision had not produced in her some kind of hypnotic state. And suddenly Madame Sassonoff said:

"Round your smooth golden hair I see a crown of the little white roses of passion. And over your head is a small

white cloud, and the voices say : ' It is very well. Death alone will finish it with a traitor's shaft in the back of the spine. And the roses round your hair turn all to a jet black. But they do not fade. So whilst lamenting, you will approve the death.' "

Lady Aldington laughed. She could not associate the gorgeous bad taste of the hotel room and the climbing showers of hot-house blooms with any gift of serious prophecy. " What was it you said the *sgaravoie* said ? " she asked.

" I could not repeat it," the Baroness answered. " I do not know ; it is gone out of my mind."

" It was something about being shot in the back by a traitor," Lady Aldington commented. " I do not see how that could happen to me, or even to Aldington, unless one of the workmen in my mines in Galizia took it into his head to do something of the sort. There are some rough customers in that republic."

" I do not know," the Baroness said blankly. " It is gone from my mind." And then she laughed, with a gentle cooing sound. " My dear Emily," she said, " you are thirty-one. But you are a little frozen white lamb. When you find the sun, shall you not go frisking in the green grass like all the others ? Yes, surely you shall. For do you not understand you have never lived ? "

" Never lived ! " Lady Aldington said, with a polite bitterness. " Have you an idea what my life has been ? "

" No, don't become unenglish over your wrongs," Madame Sassonoff warned her. " I know that if you scratch an English woman you find a grievance. But just because I know very well what your life has been, I know very well that you have never lived, and in the end life must come. Did you ever hear of the nightingales of Kurshk district ? . . . The nightingales of the Kurshk district are celebrated all through Holy Russia for the

sweetness of their voices. Well, those whose occupation it is to catch and to sell these little servants of Heaven and of love, *les attrapent très jeunes ; ils les prennent de leurs nids et puis ils les tiennent pendant deux, pendant trois années dans des caves. . . .* You understand, they have the belief that the nightingale sings best if it has never sung for several years, or has never sung at all. So when these nightingales have lived to long to sing for all those years, upon a moonlight night they take such a nightingale from the cellar where it has lived in silence. And in the moonlight they hang it in its little cage in the park of a prince or the garden of a lover who has paid them a great deal of money. And so the bird sings all through that moonlight night, and in the morning it dies."

Lady Aldington smiled a little. "If some of the gentlemen who come to my receptions were to hear that," she said, "they would move in the House for a detachment of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals people to be sent to the district of Kurshk."

"My dear," Madame Sassonoff replied, "God also is sometimes such a trainer of nightingales. After many years He will let one loose in the garden of a prince or of a lover. And not even the British Constitution can send Prevention of Cruelty People to God."

"I don't think you quite understand," Emily said, "how we live in England. I don't want to be pharisaic, of course ; but we don't give way in this sort of thing as foreigners do. I don't say we're any better for it, but our training is different."

"Oh, come," the Baroness said, "we are not the high contracting powers of England and Russia ; there is no need for you to utter these official falsehoods to me. Let me tell you a little anecdote. If you cling so much to your British chastity, let me give you a little warning. Once Aldington was in my salon in the hotel at Cairo. He was

all alone, waiting for me. But when I came in he did not hear me, for he was looking out of the window. And he had on his face such an extraordinary expression, he was looking so intently, that I too went to look and see what it was he was looking at. You were on that marble terrace where they had the geraniums in tubs. And you were talking to the Graham boy. And you were laughing—laughing! My dear, I never saw you so animated.”

“The poor Graham boy!” Lady Aldington said. “He was killed at Adis Abeba.”

“And your husband was looking at you and muttering. He had had a little too much wine for lunch.”

“Well, you needn’t tell me what he said,” Lady Aldington interrupted.

“I wasn’t going to,” the Baroness said. “But I thought I would warn you.”

“He said as much to my face,” Lady Aldington uttered; and then she suddenly really did break out. “Tell me what I ought to have done. I don’t know. Three years ago—just about that time—Aldington was very unhappy. Yes, I mean unhappy, not merely disagreeable. I didn’t like to see him suffer, and I said in exactly these words: ‘Look here, Aldington, if I divorced you and gave you a couple of hundred thousand, would you marry that woman?’ And he looked at me and swore. ‘Marry her?’ he said. ‘Good God, no! She was a barmaid.’”

“It’s still the same woman?” Madame Sassonoff asked.

“It’s still the same,” Emily answered. “I don’t know what she’s like. I know she was a barmaid. And I think I’ve gathered to-day that she has a cockney voice, and drops her h’s. And her extravagance must be extraordinary. I know in one way and another Aldington gets fifteen thousand a year out of me. Why, she has a house in Curzon Street. . . .” And Lady Aldington’s eyes filled with unmistakable tears. “My dear,” she said,

"what is the attraction of these creatures? Why is it that we women have to suffer? They appear to be nothing, these women. They are vulgar, they daub themselves with paint. And the men howl over them and suffer the pains of the damned. And if one offers to set them free to marry, they say, 'My God, no!' What does it mean? Isn't it the most abominable insult one can have offered to one? What *does* it mean?"

Madame Sassonoff shook her head almost sadly. "Ah! if one only knew that!"

After a time she added, "My dear, no, it's not an insult. Men are made like that. They are all the same." And then she added again, "Sometimes I think it is a compliment—to our delicacy. Men are coarse creatures. They need a touch of coarseness in their companions. It's necessary for them. It's what keeps them going. We're too delicate."

"But," Lady Aldington said plaintively, "we—that is, you have your lovers."

"Perhaps," Madame Sassonoff reflected, "that's only a matter of reaction too. Sergius Mihailovitch has a terrible wife. A terrible woman. She was the daughter of a London tailor."

Suddenly, as if she thought she had unbent more than sufficiently, Lady Aldington drew herself up into an attitude of British calm, which was symbolised by her taking from her pocket her little green card-case. And she began to ask questions about the Woronzow-Dashkoffs, and Prince Peshkoff, and the Lacour-Chantelleries, and other people who had been at Cairo three years before. Madame Sassonoff returned the appropriate answers. And very shortly Lady Aldington rose and achieved the feat of laying one of her own cards and two of her husband's on the corner of a marble console table that was much occupied by many vases of flowers. She made her adieux,

and Madame Sassonoff's man had already opened the door, when the Baroness said :

"Of course, Sergius Mihailovitch is perfectly trustworthy as to money, if that's what you mean by 'quite' . . . He has given all his money away, you know."

Lady Aldington halted in her path towards the door. "I should have thought," she said, "that that would have made him exceedingly untrustworthy in money matters."

"Oh, come ! " the Baroness said. "Don't be so extravagantly English ! Sergius Mihailovitch was an extremely wealthy man. Not, of course, wealthy as people like you go ; but still decidedly well off. Well off, even for England. And he gave it all away. Don't you see that that makes him absolutely unlikely to try to get at your money ? "

"Oh, I can look after my money well enough," Lady Aldington said. "Whom did he give his money to ? "

"I thought he'd related his whole biography to you," the Baroness commented. "He gave the money, of course, to that London Russian anarchist club. Wasn't it fine ? "

Lady Aldington said : "Oh dear ! " rather helplessly ; and then she added, "But didn't it help those wretches to go on throwing bombs ? "

The Baroness said : "My dear ! How extraordinarily obtuse you are as soon as we get on to the subject of Sergius Mihailovitch. Of course the money broke up that anarchist club altogether. As soon as there was a large sum of money to be divided, those anarchists divided it. Then of course they became capitalists. Sergius Mihailovitch is accustomed to say that half the cheap restaurants, gambling clubs, and sweating tailors' businesses in one quarter of London, whose name I forget—half of them were set up by his first fortune. . . ."

"His *first* fortune?" Lady Aldington ejaculated.

"Well, of course he came into a second," the Baroness said, "on the death of his mother. The second fortune he gave to some Socialist society in the west end of London. Sergius Mihailovitch says that those people were all discontented middle-class failures. Of course, his second fortune broke *them* up."

"But, dear me," Lady Aldington said, "did he want to break them up?"

"Goodness, no!" the Baroness said. "But don't you see these people being about to regenerate society—that is what Sergius Mihailovitch says in his pleasant manner—being about to regenerate society, they naturally wanted to be careful of how they set about it. When they got money, they naturally wanted to print pamphlets. These advanced people always want to print pamphlets. It's a mania. So that ruined them."

"But how could pamphlets——" Lady Aldington was beginning to ask.

The Baroness laughed outright. "Oh, dear!" she said, "don't you understand? They could not agree as to whose pamphlets they were to publish. So they all went to law. They had innumerable lawsuits. There was a little gentleman called Pett—of real genius; but, of course, not of our world . . ."

"What did Mr. Pett do?" Lady Aldington asked. "I met him last night."

The Baroness said: "Yes, dear Sergius is very fond of taking those people about. He has introduced them to the Grand Duke. He's brought them here. . . . Well, Mr. Pett wanted all the pamphlets that that society published, to be by himself. He said that he was the only one of the club that could write English."

"But he drops his h's," Lady Aldington protested.

"Of course I do not notice that, being not English,"

Madame Sassonoff said. She motioned with her hand to her man to shut the door and go away. Then she said :

“Dearest—sit down again that I can explain to you what a really beautiful character Sergius Mihailovitch has.”

Lady Aldington obediently sat down. “You’re always good fun to listen to,” she said. “But it all sounds a little like madness. Why should Count Macdonald have given his money away, and why should he go about with that terrible little cockney?”

“Ah,” the Baroness said, “Sergius Mihailovitch is the darling baby of us all—of all the court, and of all of us in Russia who are what you would call in English ‘quite good people.’ And if you mean by ‘quite’ does Sergius Mihailovitch come of ‘quite good people,’ of course he does. As to his giving away his money, that is a thing that you cannot well understand. But to us Russians, it is part of our nature. Why, one of these days I shall give all my money away to build some monastery or to improve flying machines, or to convert India—or England, for the matter of that—to the orthodox church. I shall go begging my way along the roads. . . .”

Lady Aldington said : “My dear !” in a tone of real concern.

“Oh yes, I shall,” the Baroness said sagely. “And it will not be madness, it’s in us. It’s in the Russian people, from the highest to the lowest. There was a case I knew in Russia . . . a poor tailor, the cousin of one of my serfs. This tailor was miserably poor. He lived in a cellar beneath a nobleman’s house, and patched up the uniforms of second-rate officials. One day a drunken idiot came in to his cellar and said to the tailor, ‘Little brother, I’m starving. I can’t work. I have come to live with you.’ And, mind you, this drunken idiot was no relative of the tailor, who had never seen him before. So the drunken idiot lived with the tailor. He stole all the tailor’s money

for drink ; he stole the second-rate officials' uniforms, and pawned them for drink. At last, in a moment of anger, the tailor locked him out of the cellar, and the drunkard went away. Who knows where ? Then on the next morning the tailor hanged himself. You understand that he could not bear to think that he had turned one of God's poor people away from the door. And we are all like that, we Russians. At any moment any one of us may do such a thing."

"But it's horrible," Lady Aldington said. "One could not trust oneself with any Russian. Of course, there was Count Tolstoi. . . ."

"Oh, Alexis Alexëivitch," the Baroness said, with a touch of contempt in her voice. "The newspapers made an enormous fuss about him ; but nobody mentioned the poor cousin of my serf, and there are a million Russians like that. Sergius Mihailovitch is one of them."

"He does not seem to have been very patient with his anarchist and socialist friends," Lady Aldington said. "He got tired of them in the end."

"Oh !" the Baroness answered, "must he not have his phases like anyone else who grows older ? Even your newspaper-advertised Tolstoi went through his phases. He was a gambling officer, and then a Social reformer, and then a Quietist. Sergius Mihailovitch has gone through his phases in the reverse direction, that is all. At present he is assimilating the ideas of the great Mr. Pett. To those I should say he will adhere to the end of his life. The voices have told me that Mr. Pett will kill Sergius Mihailovitch."

"Kill him ?" Lady Aldington said.

"Yes," the Baroness answered. "He will murder him. That's what I mean."

"But this is being mad," Lady Aldington said. "If you think Count Macdonald is going to be murdered—what is it about ? Will the little man be jealous of his wife ?

If you think Count Macdonald is going to be murdered, aren't you going to do something to prevent it? "

The Baroness shook her head. "We are Orientals, we are Fatalists, we Russians," she said. "How are you going to prevent it? And, no, it will not be about Mr. Pett's wife. Sergius Mihailovitch has a wife of his own. As one of your ministers said of one of your prime ministers, 'The right honourable gentleman was married for many years to a lady of no charm, with little intellect, and of a disagreeable character, to whom, nevertheless, he was singularly faithful.' "

"Well," Lady Aldington said, "if he's faithful to his wife he has at least one virtue that an English woman can appreciate."

And once more she rose to go. Madame Sassonoff looked up at her sagaciously.

"I don't know," she said, "that in this case it's really a virtue. The woman ought to be drowned, or she will kill dear Sergius before Mr. Pett can do it. Did you ever meet an English shopkeeper's wife? "

"I don't believe I ever did," Lady Aldington answered.

"Well, study her well when you meet her," Madame Sassonoff said. "I understand that Countess Macdonald is a typical member of that class."

"I don't suppose," Lady Aldington said, "that I ever shall meet her."

"Oh yes, you will," the Baroness answered. "I think you will find that Sergius Mihailovitch is going to England to-morrow."

Lady Aldington laughed from the doorway.

Her visit to her aunt, Mrs. Crewkerne, was as trying as she could have expected. Mrs. Crewkerne had been a Mademoiselle Duminy, the sister of Lady Aldington's father, the French Lieutenant de Vaisseau. Mademoiselle

Duminy had married an English west-country parson, who had hoped for preferment from the fact of his wife's distant connection with a duke. The preferment had never come, and Mrs. Crewkerne had vegetated in a small isolated rectory until she had become as typically and disagreeably an English clergyman's wife as if she had been born in a cathedral close. Upon the death of her husband, Mrs. Crewkerne had been left entirely destitute. Lady Aldington had not only supported her since then, she had also treated the disagreeable old woman as if she were a dowager of the house of Aldington or Kintyre. When they went to Egypt, Mrs. Crewkerne went with them ; and she would have lived with them in London but for the fact that her health required a country life. Lady Aldington, indeed, treated her with a formal deference and a patient respect that came to her with her French blood. The only reward that she got for this was that Mrs. Crewkerne had conceived an immense and whole-hearted admiration for Lord Aldington. She was indeed his sole admirer in the whole world, so that the great part of her conversation was devoted to telling her niece that she treated Aldington badly. She said that Emily ought to pay more attention to the poor man's comfort, and, during the whole of that afternoon, she embroidered unceasingly upon this theme. She instructed her niece as to how, by seeing that he never went out without a liver-protector when there was the least touch of east wind, she had managed to keep the Rev. Mr. Crewkerne in a good humour. She had given him linseed tea every Saturday night of their married life. She had seen on every single night that his sleeping-socks were aired and warmed. And she enjoined upon Emily all these stratagems for recovering the affections of her husband.

Once Lady Aldington said : " But, aunt, he has twenty-four servants to wait upon him in my house, and seven in another."

But her aunt paid no attention to this speech, and that was almost the only time that Emily opened her lips during the two hours and a half of her visit.

Mrs. Crewkerne managed to make even the gilded room of the best hotel of Nauheim give Lady Aldington the feeling that she was sitting in the small stuffy chamber of a country parsonage, on a long Saturday afternoon, whilst the vicar was preparing his sermon. And that is exactly what, with one of her rare smiles, Lady Aldington said to Sergius Mihailovitch Macdonald, when she found him waiting for her in the hall of the hotel.

"Ah," he said, "you feel like a schoolgirl released. And so do I. I am going to England to-morrow."

V

MACDONALD found his wife standing in the drawing-room of the Grand Duke's suite in the Hotel des Anglais. The room was officially furnished with chairs and tables, and even pictures which had formerly been the property of Marie Antoinette. The proprietor of the hotel had purchased these articles under the impression that they would afford comfortable associations to such royal guests as deigned to visit him. The rooms had been used, amongst other people, by Napoleon III, the Emperor don Pedro of Brazil, and, the year before, by the dethroned King of Galizia ; so that the Grand Duke, who possessed a sense of humour, was accustomed to call this apartment the Memento Mori room, and to wish that his imperial nephew might pay him a visit there. Indeed, with the view to this possibility, the Grand Duke had ordered from Paris full-length portraits of each of those dethroned sovereigns. Thus, in place of "Fêtes Galantes" by Watteau or Lancret, these lugubrious personages looked down from the walls. To make the joke more complete, the Grand Duke had ordered a large and particularly ugly copy of "Les Enfants d'Edouard," and this monstrosity the Grand Duke had caused to be placed upon an easel immediately in front of the principal door by which, when the Emperor visited the Grand Duke, he must necessarily enter. Indeed, every time that Macdonald passed through the room, the immense and lugubrious picture of the murdered princes of the Tower

gave him a disagreeable shock. He had, indeed, ventured to remonstrate with his imperial master. He said that the picture was in the very worst of tastes. But the Grand Duke, with the sinister jocularly that distinguished him from other princes, answered Sergius Mihailovitch with the words :

“ And why not ? That *crétin* is persuaded that I desire to play Richard of Gloucester to his children. Let him understand that I know he suspects me of that imbecile design.”

And Sergius Mihailovitch had left it at that.

It was more than his wife could do. She was a sufficiently startling figure to find amongst the royal furniture and the imperial bibelots. The daughter of a London tailor of renown, Sergius Mihailovitch had met her rather frequently at socialistic meetings in the Putney of the early 'nineties. It is impossible to know why foreigners of distinction fall desperately in love with English women of the lower classes. Perhaps Macdonald had fallen in love with her hands ; with her voice, which was not loud but exceedingly determined ; with the precision with which she enunciated socialist doctrines of the Fabian order ; or with the æsthetic cut of her trailing garments. But the tragedy of the unfortunate Russian's fate enacted that, whereas his own views had completely altered, his wife's had remained exactly the same. She still dressed in clothes of sage green, her sleeves still swept the floor ; round her neck was a rope of amber beads, each one as large as a duck's egg. Her dark hair was elaborately waved with curling irons, and because she passed the greater part of her life in the open air, she had a startlingly high colour. From endless discussions in which she attempted to force Sergius Mihailovitch back into the roads of orthodox socialism, her face had assumed a permanently strained expression, and her voice had grown high and

slightly discordant. Sergius Mihailovitch, upon taking up his post in the Grand Duke's suite, had done his best to impress her with the fact that she must not attempt to convert the Grand Duke himself to the principles of Karl Marx. He had had the utmost difficulty in persuading the lady to promise him that she would not do so. Indeed, he had had to threaten to leave her at home in England before he could feel reasonably safe in the matter. It was no good telling her that to preach socialism to a grand duke—even to a grand duke travelling incognito—would show a serious lack of tactfulness. She said that there are higher things than tact. And she said that truth is great and shall prevail. Macdonald said that she might practise her converting zeal upon the other gentlemen in attendance upon the eminent person, upon their wives, and the pages and servants. This was not at all what Countess Macdonald desired. She wanted to have a grand duke sitting at her feet. So that at last she gave Sergius Mihailovitch the promise that he needed. She was not going to speak to the Imperial Highness directly about municipal trading or the general distribution of wealth. But she was pretty determined to make the Grand Duke see that if socialism could turn out a creature so altogether desirable as herself, it would be a good thing for him if he became her student. And she imagined that she would be able to do this without ever quoting one of the three hundred and twenty-eight Fabian tracts upon which her faith was founded. Thus Sergius Mihailovitch had no actual mortification caused him, beyond the fact that all the attendants upon the Grand Duke considered that his wife was mad. And to this he was pretty well hardened by that date. Moreover, as most of his companions considered that if he had married a tailor's daughter she must have been a millionairess, they mostly regarded Macdonald himself with envy

It was of no use his saying that she had not brought him a penny. They simply would not believe it. No one, they said, would take less than one hundred thousand roubles a year to sit opposite a scarecrow at breakfast every morning. For they regarded the Countess Macdonald as a scarecrow, their own women dressing in clothes that came from Paris.

Crossing the room, Macdonald said amicably to his wife: "Why, Margaret, what are you doing here?"

His wife made a use of her eyes that she would have called scornfully looking him up and down. She strongly disapproved of his having visited, even at the Grand Duke's orders, Madame Sassonoff. She did not indeed believe that the Grand Duke had ordered her husband to call on that lady, whom she regarded as a dissolute member of the Russian smart set. That, at least, was the phrase she used. Once, when the Duke of Nottingham, who had met Sergius Mihailovitch at the Russian Embassy, had called upon Countess Macdonald at Putney, that lady being at the time without a servant had sent the Duke into her kitchen to fetch the kettle for tea. That, she was accustomed to say, was like her.

Now, having looked twice from Macdonald's head to his heels, she brought out in a deep angry voice the words:

"I'm trying to do more than you ever did here. I'm trying to do some good."

The Countess Macdonald had come there with a double object. She had wanted to discover whether the Grand Duke really had sent her husband to Madame Sassonoff, and she was going to read and to explain to him a work by the late William Morris, called "The Roots of the Mountains." She had lent it to H.I.H. some days before. On the previous evening he had told her that he had not

been able to make head or tail of it. Now she was going to explain it.

"Oh, well," Macdonald said lightly as he passed her, "that's a good thing, but a jolly hard job." He was passing on towards a small gilt door at the end of the long room.

"Tell the Duke," his wife commanded, "not to keep me waiting any longer."

Macdonald nodded slightly.

The Grand Duke's own suite consisted of a great number of little rooms, the one opening out of the other. They were all exceedingly untidy, for the Grand Duke disliked orderliness beyond all things; so that in one little room books, in another clothes, and in another empty champagne bottles lay about on the valuable carpets. Indeed, in one room—that which was decorated by the champagne bottles—all the looking-glasses were broken, and the glass, mingled with bottle glass, lay about on the carpets. The night before the Grand Duke had been exercising himself by throwing bottles at his own reflection in the mirrors. This was not a mere display of senseless waste. It had occurred to H.I.H. that a bottle is a capital weapon in a restaurant, in case you should be approached by an assassin, or by any other troublesome person. And this idea happening to occur to him when he was sitting in the little room which contained a great number of old wall mirrors, it had at once occurred to him that he had better practise this means of self-defence. Indeed, he took great credit to himself that he had only flung one full bottle at a looking-glass. He had sent to the cellar of the hotel for several dozen empty ones. He said that nobody, after that, could call him wasteful. Nevertheless, the old glasses which had reflected the features of Marie Antoinette and of how many other fallen royalties would certainly never

The Duke, who was distinguished for the enormous strength of his hands, with a single effort tore the yellow volume in half. H.I.H. was wearing a bathing wrap of pink Chinese silk embroidered all over with great dragons. It came down right to his feet, and added to his tall, stout figure an air of exaggerated voluminousness. The gipsy, who regarded this royal personage as a constant farcical entertainment, had come into the room and was leaning against the door-post, grinning negligently, with her legs crossed.

"That I will do to you, wild cat," the Grand Duke said ; "one of these days I will break you in half like this book."

One half of the torn volume he threw on to the floor, and the other at the head of the gipsy. She bent down—and indeed she was like a wild cat—and, picking up a handful of the scattered leaves, she flung them back at the Grand Duke so that the white squares fluttered all over his bald head. Then she ran away in the next room, screaming with laughter. A soft odour of aromatic herbs spread slowly into the room from the vapour bath. The Duke yawned enormously.

"I have had a terrible day. I have taken six baths this afternoon. It is the only place where I could think myself safe."

Sergius Mihailovitch said : "Imperial Highness ?" interrogatively.

"Yes, my friend," the Duke repeated, "safe ! I am afraid for my life. All day I've been afraid—of your wife."

Macdonald laughed.

"But what a terrible woman !" the Duke exclaimed. "What an overwhelming woman ! She is camped in my drawing-room. She has got a terrible book that she insists on reading to me. It is incomprehensible ; it is maddening. I never knew such books existed ! I never knew such

women existed ! My good friend, Sergius Mihailovitch, you deserve Siberia because you did not strangle that woman on your wedding night."

Macdonald said gaily : " That book is by a great English poet and moralist. It would immensely improve Imperial Highness's morals to let Madame la Comtesse expound it to Imperial Highness. Let me tell Imperial Highness something about William Morris, the English poet and moralist who wrote that book which no one was ever able to read—except when they were reading it to someone who was driven mad with terror at the thought of hearing it."

The Grand Duke said : " Seriously, my friend, I do not believe you are safe with that woman. For God's sake, for my sake, since I do not want to lose your services, have her locked up. I tell you she will bore you to death ! I tell you she will bore me to death ! . . . And she makes eyes at me. But eyes ! I am frightened out of my life ! My good friend, supposing she should transfer her ardent affections from you to me ! How horrible that would be ! But what a blessing for you ! Horrible ! Besides, it is hardly creditable to you in the capacity of husband. Get rid of her, Sergius Mihailovitch, my good fellow ! "

Sergius Mihailovitch drew himself up to his full height and clicked his heels together.

" Imperial Highness will of course expect," he said, " that after such an insult offered to the lady who shares my name, I shall at once hand in to your Highness my demission."

The Duke looked at him with a face of incredulous panic. " But Sergius Mihailovitch ! " he spluttered, " but my good fellow——"

" I desire," Macdonald said, " to leave Wiesbaden to-morrow."

" But that's impossible, my friend," the Duke said.

" To-morrow," Sergius Mihailovitch repeated.

"But, you ass," the Duke expostulated, "I have said nothing but the truth about the Countess! Death to my life, do we not all know how you suffer under this infliction? I tell you I am your friend, Sergius Mihailovitch. I will get my nephew to issue a special ukase divorcing you from this creature."

"Imperial Highness!" Macdonald answered, "it is imperative that I should go to England to-morrow——"

"Now, what woman is this after?" the Grand Duke said.

Sergius Mihailovitch reflected for the fifth of a second that the chief of the Fourth Service had seen him in the train with Lady Aldington.

"I don't want in the least to deny," he said, "that a woman has something to do with it. It is Lady Aldington, as I.H. will of course hear to-night from I.H.'s information officers."

The Grand Duke said: "This Lady Aldington who prevented you from getting gossip of Madame Sassanoff? I have seen her. She is a beautiful woman. I felicitate you, my good friend. But is it necessary that you should leave my service? Reflect a little. You are young and precipitate."

Sergius Mihailovitch bowed slightly. "Without doubt," he said ironically, "not even the most beautiful woman in the world would make me desire to leave I.H.'s services. But I desire to be of some use in the world. I am going to become the director of a motor car agency in London."

"But this is a farce!" the Duke said.

"Well, it is a farce," Sergius Mihailovitch answered. "But it will satisfy Madame la Comtesse, who is always desiring that I should be of some use in the world. Actually I am going to engineer a revolution."

The Grand Duke said: "My God! Another revolution! What a waste of time."

Sergius Mihailovitch bowed once more to the Grand Duke. "It will be a counter-revolution this time," he said.

The Grand Duke said: "Oh!" His eyes perused Macdonald's face with a searching glare. Then he uttered heavily the one word "Galizia."

Macdonald again bowed silently.

"You understand," the Duke said rather frostily, "I am financially interested. Their *rentes* are rising."

"To-day we rise, to-morrow we fall," Sergius Mihailovitch said expressionlessly. The Duke continued to gaze at him with an august glance.

"Am I to understand," he said, "that this is in the nature of financial information?"

"I.H.'s favourite dish is the little lamprey of the Don," Macdonald said. "If I.H. should receive a letter from me from London saying that the lamprey of the Don is unprocurable in the markets of that city, I.H. may take my word for it that it is financial information."

The Duke continued to gaze questioningly at Macdonald. He was a man who liked to be perfectly certain in matters of high finance.

"You mean," he said slowly, "that if I receive a letter from you in which the word lamprey is used I may regard it as an instruction to myself to 'bear' the *rentes* of that country?" He added almost threateningly, "You understand that this is a very serious matter—to give me advice that may be wrong. I may say that if the advice proves wrong your future in this world will be very precarious."

"I understand it very well," Macdonald said, with a pleasant smile. "I do not know how far this enterprise may prosper. I am engaged upon it, but I cannot tell. But I make I.H. the promise to write to him about lampreys if the enterprise seems likely enough to succeed to bring those securities down in the market. It will not need a successful revolution to do that. A mere revolt will do

it, as I.H. well knows. If it is a revolt which fails, I shall without doubt pay for it with my life, but I.H. may make a million or so."

The Grand Duke smiled suddenly. "That is a very proper spirit of loyalty," he said, a little ironically. "That is the spirit of the *preux* chevaliers who lay down their lives for the profit of their kings."

Macdonald laughed. "I don't know that it's that," he said. "I was merely thinking of gaining Your Highness's favour for the new government. It is well known that Your Highness, like your ancestor Alexander I, is prejudiced against the illustrious family that we are about to restore to its throne."

"Prejudiced!" the Duke said. "I tell you that they are ignorant, cowardly, and useless fools!" He smiled once more, however. "Of course," he said, "if I am to make a million or so out of this restoration it might change my views as to the hereditary antipathy that the Romanoffs have always felt for the Bourbons."

"If I.H.," Macdonald began warily, "could use his enormous influence in the foreign ministry to get recognition for our new government as early as possible, it will be of the greatest help."

"If I get my million," the Duke said, "you shall have it on the next day."

Macdonald bowed again. "Then that is all that I need trouble I.H. about," he said.

The Prince raised his royal eyebrows. "But hang it all, my good fellow," he said, "you've asked for nothing for yourself."

Macdonald reflected for a moment. "Your Highness," he said, "could do me the utmost favour—and make a little more money . . ."

"How? How?" the Duke asked. "Of course, I am always ready to make money."

"Supposing now," Macdonald said argumentatively, "that a couple of Russian cruisers should be going to Shanghai——"

"Oh, hang it all!" the Duke said, "I can't let Russian cruisers bombard the port of a friendly republic. We are not going to war with——"

Sergius Mihailovitch extended a soothing hand towards the Prince.

"Listen, Highness," he said. "I am talking of Russian cruisers that are going to Shanghai. On the way there is a port called Toulon. Now, supposing that these two Russian cruisers discover off the port of Toulon that their boilers—excellent boilers—are defective. The two Russian cruisers would put into the port of Toulon."

The Duke said: "There is nothing new about that. It is always happening."

"When the two Russian cruisers arrive in Toulon it is discovered that their boilers are utterly useless."

"That, too, is always happening," the Duke said. "You are thinking of the *Javorskaia* and the *Admiral Kunin*."

"I admit," Macdonald said, "that the condition of those two vessels of H.I.M.'s navy gave me the idea. But I should require vessels of a better class."

The Prince said: "Well—well?"

"Being discovered to be entirely useless, the vessels will be sold to a syndicate."

"For what price?" the prince asked, with interest.

"Let us say," Macdonald said, "for a quarter of a million pounds sterling."

"It is not very much," the Duke commented.

"It is all that I am empowered to offer," Macdonald answered. "Besides, it will be all sheer profit to Your I.H."

"Oh, come," the Duke said, "I have a conscience. I

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"Oh, come," the Duke said, "I have a conscience. I

could not take more than a million roubles for acting as agent."

"As for me," Macdonald said, "I will undertake that within a few days the war-ships shall be returned to the government of H.I.M. The syndicate having a conscience will have discovered that the war-ships are much more efficient than was supposed."

"Oh, come! come!" the Duke said, "you had better keep them for yourself, and sell them to some South American government. You will make a handsome profit."

"I am not a dealer in old iron," Macdonald answered.

The Duke looked at him fixedly. "That, of course, is an insult to me," he said.

"God forbid!" Macdonald answered. "I am only a poor man, with few of the responsibilities of Your Highness, who is a mighty prince. So I can afford to say that I will not weaken my own country by permanently removing her battle-ships. I need them only for a few days."

"You really are a most impracticable idiot!" the Prince remarked.

Macdonald bowed. "Your Highness," he said, "is only uttering the exact words that have been used time and again by my wife."

"Really, she is to be sympathised with in that particular," the Duke said. "It makes me positively angry to see how you neglect your opportunities. That must be your Scotch blood. They say, 'Fier comme un Ecossais.'"

Again Macdonald inclined his head. "Let us then," he said, "be certain that we have the details correct. Upon my writing to Your Highness about lampreys, Your Highness will conduct a financial operation. But if I telegraph that I have procured lampreys in London, Your Highness will see that the two first-class cruisers *Uvaroff* and *Alexander II*, with all their arms and ammunition on board,

are dispatched for Shanghai, under secret orders to be opened in mid-Channel."

"There will be no mistake about the money?" the Duke asked.

"There will be no mistake if I telegraph," Macdonald said.

"Then that is all," the Duke answered.

Macdonald once more bowed, and was making for the little door when once more the Duke exclaimed:

"But, hang it all, Macdonald, what are you going to live upon?"

"I?" Macdonald said. "I have already told Your Highness that I am going to become the manager of a motor car business."

"But confound it!" the Duke said. "Your faithful services . . . They can't go unrewarded."

"I have chosen for Your Highness," Macdonald said amiably, "three hundred and forty neckties. I have read the papers for six months for Your Highness to discover any amusing paragraphs. Also, I have carried three bouquets to Madame La Baronne Sassonoff, and I have bought Your Highness a novel without illustrations. I do not ask for a reward commensurate with these enormous services."

"No! no!" the Duke said. "You are a very amusing person. You must be rewarded. Wait! I will make you my supernumerary aide-de-camp with permission to reside in London. But no! no! then I should have to pay your salary.—I will name you supernumerary aide-de-camp to my nephew, with forty thousand roubles a year from the private purse, and the Order of Alexander II of the First Class, and rooms in the embassy. In that way you have an official position that will be of great service to you."

"I must still," Sergius Mihailovitch said, "take up the position of manager of motor cars. It is part of the plan."

The Grand Duke said amiably : " Damn your motor cars ! Become the manager of a pawnshop, if you like. I need not interfere with your duties, for you will have no duties. To-night I will give a banquet in your honour."

" I had rather," Sergius Mihailovitch said, " that you commanded me to attend the opera."

" Aha ! " the Grand Duke said, " that icicle will be there."

" Lady Aldington will be there," Macdonald said.

" And you are passionately devoted to her ? " the Grand Duke asked.

" Passionately ! " Macdonald answered.

" But you will never melt that icicle," the Grand Duke said.

Macdonald smiled faintly. " Do you know," he answered, " I do not know that I really want to."

" Oh, you are incorrigible ! " His Highness commented. " But I would not mind being you."

As Macdonald went through the next room, the tall, dark man who had been looking at the prints in the portfolio turned slowly upon him.

" Have you any idea," he said, " when the Grand Duke will be disengaged ? "

With his unfailing light smile Macdonald answered : " I don't really know. I'll send a man, if you like. Or, no, I'll go and ask him myself."

But at that moment the Duke threw the door open. With his immense bulk swathed in its pink bath robes, he had the air of having burst it open with his heavy shoulder.

" My God, Kintyre," he said, " I've kept you waiting. My dear fellow, I was having a bath."

The tall, dark man smiled faintly. " Oh, it's all right," he said. " I only came to look at your Rops's. I've been right through the portfolio."

Macdonald was going out of the room when the Prince said:

"Wait a minute, Sergius Mihailovitch. This gentleman may be of use to you. He is the Duc de Batalha."

The tall, dark man gathered the point of his beard in rather spidery fingers and bit it reflectively.

"I'd be delighted to be of service to your friend," he said; "but I'm not the Duke of Batalha, you know. I feel as if I ought to be. But I'm not."

The Grand Duke muttered some genial curses against English titles and their complexity.

"I thought you were Kintyre, Dijon, and Batalha," he said. "Your uncle was."

"No," he got his answer. "I'm only Kintyre and Dijon. Batalha went to my cousin, Lady Aldington, along with almost everything that was worth having in the beastly titles. That's why I am so poor."

"Poor!" the Grand Duke grumbled. "You're all alike, you people. You don't know what poverty is."

"I wish," Kintyre said meditatively, "that my cousin Emily Aldington was dead. I'm her heir."

The Grand Duke put his finger upon his lips. "Oh, you mustn't say that here, Duke," he said. "We have the highest admiration for that lady. We are going to the opera to-night in her honour."

Kintyre said: "Oh, I didn't know, I am sure."

And then Macdonald asked him: "Is Lady Aldington really the owner of Batalha? I had heard that the person one had to negotiate with was a Scotchman of my own name. They call him *le rey de Batalha*."

Kintyre looked him up and down with a leisurely glance.

"This is Count Macdonald," the Grand Duke said, the spoiled baby of all the Russias."

Kintyre uttered an "Oh!" that expressed the fact that in that case Sergius Mihailovitch was a person that he could talk to.

Then he addressed him : " Of course, if you wanted to buy tin or cobalt or whatever it is that they get out of the mines, you would have to address yourself to a Scotchman, and probably his name would be Macdonald. All large undertakings are managed by Scotchmen, and they are generally called Macdonald. Sometimes they're called Graham." He looked at Macdonald carefully again. " But I don't suppose you want tin or cobalt ? " he added.

" Sergius Michailovitch," the Grand Duke said, " only wants to give money away. I kept you waiting all this time because I was trying to make him accept a high position with a salary. And it was so much trouble that I perspired until I might just as well have never taken a bath at all."

Again Kintyre surveyed Macdonald curiously. " I suppose you can afford it," he said at last. " I only wish somebody would offer me a salaried position."

" Well, you know," Macdonald said amiably, " I could always take you as assistant manager in a motor car shop."

" Oh, you're interested in motor cars ? " the Duke questioned. " I wish I was. I wish I was interested in anything."

" What a confoundedly discontented fellow you are, Kintyre ! " the Grand Duke said.

" Oh, they're all like that," Macdonald explained to him. " You don't know these English as I do. Now, there's Aldington. He must be richer than the Czar, and he is always groaning. He says the Government has ruined him."

" Oh, Aldington ! " Kintyre said, with a shrug of his shoulders. " He's got no money. It's his wife that's got it all. And it ought to be mine."

" Grumble ! grumble ! grumble ! " the Grand Duke muttered. " You're as bad as a crow to-day, Kintyre."

"Well," Kintyre said, "you'd be as bad as a crow if you were me. I've just had to write a cheque for £50,000 as the last instalment of succession duty to my uncle's estate."

"There you are!" Macdonald said to the Grand Duke. "These are our English. That means that the last instalment of his succession was about five million roubles, and God knows what the other instalments were. Yet they will all tell you the same tale. Black ruin stares them in the face."

"Black ruin would stare you in the face, my friend," Kintyre said, with an amiable moodiness, "if you stood in my boots. But if you want to do anything in Batalha—if you want to sell motor cars—you'll have to ask Lady Aldington."

"I'll tell you," the Grand Duke said. "Sergius Mihailovitch doesn't want to sell. He wants to give. He wants to give Batalha a king now."

Kintyre rounded his thickly haired red lips to a slight whistle.

"And," the Grand Duke continued, "if you can do anything to help him, you'll personally oblige myself."

Macdonald flushed a little with pleasure. "Now, that's really generous of Your Highness," he said.

The Grand Duke looked at Kintyre. "Of course," he said, "that does not go beyond these four walls. I cannot be officially implicated in restoring kings. But if you hear that Macdonald wants a backing anywhere, you may let people know that he has a backing from me. Not for any particular purpose, you understand, but just a general support."

And, just as His Highness had meant, there came into the English Duke's whole demeanour an entirely different attitude towards Sergius Mihailovitch. So that it was as if with a regretful candour that he said:

"I'm afraid I can't be of much use to you in Batalha."

I wish I could. But you may take it from me that my cousin Emily really rules the roost there, and not any Scotchman." He looked at the bulky Russian prince.

"You might introduce me to Lady Aldington," he said. "I haven't met her since she was three."

"Oh, I don't know her," the Grand Duke said. "I should think she thought I wasn't respectable enough to know. I've heard that English women say that of me." And the Grand Duke chuckled pleasantly.

Kintyre looked at Macdonald, and this time his glance entirely accepted him. If Sergius Mihailovitch, the glance said, not only had the backing of the Russian prince but was also *au mieux* with an English member of his own more than princely family, there was no earthly reason why he should not treat him as a man and a brother.

"Oh, it's you," he said, "who have the soft spot for my cousin! My dear fellow, do me the favour to introduce me to her to-night. I'm going on to Ostend to-morrow, so it will have to be to-night."

"Well, of course I will," Macdonald smiled.

"You don't think," Kintyre said, "that she'll object to knowing a poor relation?"

"Why," Macdonald answered, "she was saying this afternoon that she rather wished she knew you. She just remembered you as a boy of thirteen when she lived at Chiswick."

"Then that's all right," Kintyre answered. "I thought my beastly old uncle might have set her against me. I'll come round to your box at the second act, and you shall take me to her." And Kintyre sauntered amiably out of the room.

Sergius Mihailovitch remained once more to thank the Prince, for the few words that he had uttered had, Sergius Mihailovitch was aware, done him an immense service. He knew that when he got to London he wouldn't be merely

an adventurer floating indefinitely in the air; he would have the safe anchorage of the Grand Duke's good word that Kintyre would quite certainly put about in discreet quarters.

"My good fellow," the Grand Duke answered his thanks, "don't you see that I stand to make money out of it?" And he smiled grimly in his beard.

Sergius Mihailovitch permitted himself to remark: "You know, I.H., you are rather a mystery. I shouldn't wonder if at the bottom of you there wasn't some of our Russian mysticism. I shouldn't wonder if, like myself, it worries you to think that Rome is on fire, and you wanted to help put it out."

"Mystery yourself," the Duke retorted grimly. "What do you go on these wild goose chases for? You aren't going to tell me that it's because Lady Aldington has interests in Batalha, and you want to protect her against republicans. You wouldn't want to protect anybody's interests if you loved them till you wanted to scream."

Sergius Mihailovitch set his heels together, and bowed for the last time.

"I.H.," he said, "it is well known that science is the ruling passion of this age. I have a friend and teacher called Pett, who would lecture you on this subject by the hour together. He says 'he is to inherit the earth.'" And Sergius Mihailovitch smiled faintly. "My interests in this mission are purely scientific. Perhaps that is what Socrates meant when he said that we owe a cock to Æsculapius."

"Well! well!" The Grand Duke resigned the discussion. "As the Russian proverb says, 'The heart of another is a dark forest.'"

"A dark forest," Sergius Mihailovitch repeated.

PART II

I

WELL, we're all English now, at any rate," Mr. Pett said, and he stretched his knickerbockered legs with the grey worsted stockings luxuriously out in front of the red velvet cushions of the Pullman armchair. "I'm not certain that's not a comfort."

"It feels a little like what it feels like when the ladies go up to the drawing-room after dinner, doesn't it?" Lady Aldington asked. The train was running smoothly out of the large station. "It's as if nobody had their eyes on us any more."

"I always feel, too," Mrs. Pett said, "as if foreigners were spying on me."

"That, you know," Kintyre said a little ironically, "is because the Briton is always conscious that he's a superior animal. He thinks the eyes of the world must be upon him wherever he is."

"Well, they may look at me as much as they like, and be damned to them," Lady Aldington's husband grunted. "I'm not going to change my habits for anybody."

"You would not, of course, Aldington," the Duke said, as if he were talking amiably to a butt. "You wouldn't, and you couldn't, and you don't want to, and you won't."

"Now we have all spoken once," Mr. Pett said cheerfully—"except the Duke of Kintyre, and he's had two goes. Oughtn't we to elect a president to this debating society?"

Kintyre looked slightly puzzled. He had not yet gathered how Mr. and Mrs. Pett came to be travelling in his cousin's private car, and he didn't quite know who Mr. and Mrs. Pett were, so he supposed that it was all right. Even Lady Aldington looked in the least apprehensive, as if she did not know what Mr. Pett might not be going to say next. But Mr. Pett was not going to have any silence.

"It's a pity Comrade M. isn't with us," he said reflectively; "he's capital in a mixed party. I always say he's like the oil that binds a salad together."

"I never saw him at the station," Emily Aldington said, "or I should have asked him."

"I saw him *and* asked him," Mr. Pett said, "but he wouldn't come." And then Mr. Pett appealed confidently to Lady Aldington upon a point of etiquette. "I suppose I oughtn't to have asked him into *your* saloon."

"Oh, you did perfectly right," Emily said. "Of course we want him."

"Ah, but I mean as a matter of good form," Mr. Pett insisted. "What would be the rule, now, in the best society?"

Emily Aldington really flushed a little. "Amongst really good people," she said, after a pause, "there aren't any rules at all, you know. People just do what they want, and it turns out all right. You couldn't have done anything I wanted more."

"Of course, it was really the Countess," Mr. Pett said, "that wouldn't let him come. She said you hadn't called on her."

"I will call on Countess Macdonald the moment I get to London," Lady Aldington said. And again a slightly painful silence fell upon them. Mrs. Pett, who was not able at all times to muster up her husband's purposeful self-assertion, sat with her hands clasped before her. Her face looked tiny, slightly anxious, and very weather-beaten.

She was wearing in honour of the occasion—for the night before Lady Aldington had already invited them to travel with her,—she was wearing a little ready-made coat and skirt of white canvas that she had purchased in great haste that morning. It was very stiff and did not fit her at all, and the steady gaze with which Aldington all the time regarded her was embarrassing her.

Mr. and Mrs. Pett and Emily sat on the red velvet armchairs ; the Duke of Kintyre, with his sallow face and black beard, strolled up and down the long carriage as if he wished slightly to dissociate himself from his cousin's protégés. Only now and then did he drop in a word. Aldington, behind his wife's chair, leaned heavily against the plate-glass panel of the window that showed, rapidly moving, the factory chimneys and the slag heaps of the German landscape. He gazed all the time with a sort of fascinated, smouldering passion at the tiny little woman. She reminded him of the woman who was known to Lady Aldington only as Matilda. She wasn't in the least like Matilda, who was large, painted, and inclined to grow fat ; but every one of Mrs. Pett's motions and every note of her voice reminded him of Matilda, who, in Curzon Street, was known as Mrs. Montmorency De la Cour.

Suddenly Kintyre, sauntering towards Mr. Pett with his hands deep in the pockets of his pilot coat, and swaying slightly in a nautical manner to the swaying of the train—before his accession Kintyre had passed the greater part of his life yachting—Kintyre exclaimed :

“ I didn't quite catch the name of your constituency.”

“ I'm not in Parliament,” Mr. Pett said. “ I haven't time for fancy frills. I am a thinker.”

Kintyre said : “ Ah ! ” And before he sauntered away again he let drop the words : “ I thought my cousin did not know anyone who wasn't a Radical member. It's generally considered rather desirable, you know.”

Mr. Pett refrained from letting his retort fly at the Duke's back, which was already towards him.

"It's extraordinary," he said to Lady Aldington, "how little these dilettantes know of the value of life. Who's got time to sit in Parliament now that it's such a discredited institution? It was all right in the 'forties. But I'd as soon be on the London County Council or Islington Vestry nowadays. That's what your friend means by saying that Rome is on fire. That's part of what he means."

"But what does all that he means come to?" Lady Aldington asked. "He said that it meant several thousand things in one."

"Ah!" Mr. Pett answered, "he means everything that's going on in the world. All the movements in this immense jungle that we live in; all the things that it takes a mind like mine to catch hold of and understand."

"Well, it *is* rather like a dark forest," Lady Aldington said.

"You got that from Comrade M.," Mr. Pett accused her.

"Yes, I did," Lady Aldington answered; "he used the phrase last night."

"He's always using it," Mr. Pett said. "He's a most extraordinary chap, is Comrade M."

"May I ask," Kintyre's voice suddenly interrupted, "why you always call Count Macdonald Comrade M.?"

"Well, you see," Mr. Pett answered, "once he was an Anarchist, then he was a Socialist, then he was a member of the first Duma. . . ."

"Oh, we know all about his wild oats," the Duke said.

"My good chap," Mr. Pett raised his voice to say sharply, "I dare say you do. I was just uttering those words so as to get hold of my subject. I am trying to tell Lady Aldington all about His Excellency Count Sergius Mihailovitch Macdonald. She likes to hear about him."

The Duke slightly raised his eyebrows and turned away. He found it necessary to reflect for a moment or two when he had been sharply rapped over the knuckles. Mr. Pett turned immediately once more upon Lady Aldington.

"Of course, your ladyship isn't to understand," he said, "that Macdonald is a regular Admirable Crichton. He isn't a thinker in the sense that I am. He acts along the lines of his generous impulses. That is to say that he feels ; he doesn't think."

"I should think," Emily said, "that that is what gets him into trouble."

"Trouble?" Mr. Pett said. "He's never been in any trouble that I know of."

"But he's lost all his money, hasn't he?" Lady Aldington asked.

"That's not a trouble," Mr. Pett answered. "It might be for you ; it might be for me, since I have managed to put by a little for a rainy day. But it's not a trouble for Macdonald ; it's just fun."

"Then I suppose it's creditable of him," Emily said.

"Creditable," Mr. Pett answered. "Yes, it's creditable if it's creditable for the sun to shine or for vines to grow grapes. Don't you understand? It's just Macdonald. He can't help himself."

"But it shows at least that he has a generous nature," Lady Aldington said.

"He's got a generous nature right enough," Mr. Pett said. "But that's no particular credit to him. He'd give a fortune away to a cause that appealed to him, just as easily as you'd throw a lump of sugar to a dog if the dog happened to be begging of you when you were sitting at a table with the sugar basin on it."

"Still——" Lady Aldington began.

Mr. Pett became almost exasperated, so much did he dislike to hear anyone praised when he was present.

"*Can't* your ladyship understand?" he said. "You appear to be quite an intelligent person." And Mr. Pett sputtered a little under his heavy moustache. "Look here, I'll try to give you an illustration! Once Macdonald and I were on a bus coming from a Fabian meeting at Ealing. The bus ran into a lamp standard, and there was a girl hurt—a servant or a factory hand, of the same class that I come of. Well, of course a crowd collected and the police came. And of course the police, who hate the lower classes like poison, were down upon the girl at once. They said she was shamming. The girl had fainted, but they shook her out of the faint—the policemen did—and tried to make her say there was nothing the matter with her. The police, of course, are on the side of the big omnibus companies, and were trying to prevent the girl getting damages against the company. I tell you the police hate the poor like poison—I knew that. I stood on top of that bus with the large crowd all round it. I didn't want to do anything. I only wanted to get back home. I knew that if I spoke to the police they'd run me in for being drunk and impeding them in the course of their duties. Regular nasty temper they were in, and I'd instinctively got the poor man's fear of the police. If you'd ever been one of the lower classes you'd have known what it meant. But what did Macdonald do? Just exactly what was natural to him. He walked down those bus steps smiling that smile of his, and he put his hand into his breast pocket and took out his card-case and gave a card to a policeman. He was actually humming. Yes! humming! And he produced half a sovereign to guarantee the doctor's fee in case the omnibus company didn't have to pay damages. And the police touched their helmets and kowtowed all round him, and then the crowd and the police and the whole lot of them streamed off up the road to the nearest doctor's, with Macdonald at their head still humming. And

four policemen were carrying the girl as if she had been made of glass. And I stood on top of the bus with my jaw hanging down in sheer amazement. I shouldn't have thought it was possible. But when Macdonald came back he was rolling a cigarette and still humming. He couldn't see that he'd done anything at all, while as for me, it struck me as the bravest action I'd ever witnessed. And as for producing the half-sovereign—why, I dare say it was Macdonald's last coin. I know it was. And I was fairly well off, because I was beginning to make money then, owing very much to the way Macdonald had helped me to make a start. And I'm not at all close with money, but it would no more have entered my head to produce the half-sovereign. . . . Why, it *couldn't* have entered my head. It was never there among the traditions of my ancestry."

"But he only did his duty," Lady Aldington said. "He couldn't see a poor girl ill-treated by the police. He would have to interfere."

"His duty!" Mr. Pett exclaimed. "Yes, his duty, and your duty, and your husband's duty. But not mine. It would never have entered my head. Not if I sat on the bus and reflected on it to this day. But it never had to enter his head at all. It was there all the time. He just got up and did it. Automatically, as a cat catches a mouse or water puts out fire."

"Well, of course he would," Lady Aldington said.

"But why? . . ." Mr. Pett caught her up. "Because he's a member of the ruling classes. Just as you are. Just as your husband is. Just as the Duke of Kintyre is. But Anne and me . . ."

And Mr. Pett pointed to his wife, who sat silent under the embarrassing gaze of Lord Aldington.

"Anne and me, we're just the lower classes. We accept the brutalities of the police. We don't try to

rescue each other. We don't even know that it can be done."

"Oh, come!" Lady Aldington said amiably.

"It's true, your ladyship," Mr. Pett asseverated vigorously. "Of course, I know now that it can. I have seen it done. But even now I should have to think twice before doing it. For all I've grown so conceited and sure of my place in the world."

Lady Aldington said: "I'm not in the least thinking of denying that all Count Macdonald's actions are very fine."

"No! no! *no!*" Mr. Pett said in tones of positive exasperation. "None of Macdonald's actions are fine. They are just Macdonald. He doesn't deserve any credit. I should, if I did what he did. But he can't help himself."

Kintyre slowly strolled up to them, and, addressing his cousin, remarked softly:

"Don't you see, Emily, this gentleman won't allow anyone else to praise his friend, just as he won't allow anyone else to blame him? But if I may be allowed to interrupt the discussion, I should like to say that I think that our friend only acts along the lines of the traditions of a gentleman of good breeding and lineage."

Mr. Pett, who intensely disliked that anyone other than himself should lecture an assembly in which he was present, remarked:

"Well, a blind hen *has* found a pea!"

"But if our friend," the Duke continued amiably, "will let me finish my speech, I should like to say that it's very fine of Count Macdonald to act so well up to his traditions. For we all of us have fine traditions, but there are precious few of us who are much guided by them."

Whilst the Duke had been speaking, Lady Aldington had summoned her footman and was whispering into his ear. She found one of her cards, wrote two words on it with a little silver pencil, and sent the man away along the

corridor of the train, which was running along the Rhine where it broadens out just before Rudesheim. And then suddenly little Mrs. Pett spoke so that they were all startled.

"That's really the reason," she said, "why our friend Macdonald has started out on his new wild goose chase."

Mr. Pett said good-humouredly: "Shut up, Anne!" But his wife continued speaking composedly:

"It was that night that gave Herbert his new idea, and it's his new idea that Macdonald is going on. That's why Count Macdonald went back into the Russian Imperial service."

"I don't in the least understand you," Lady Aldington said.

"Oh, be quiet, Anne!" Mr. Pett ejaculated.

But Mrs. Pett replied: "It's not the least use *your* trying to explain, Herbert. Nobody ever understands your explanations. They're too long."

She looked then at Lady Aldington. "It struck Herbert," she said, "on the top of that bus that if you've already got a stratum of society that does its duty automatically and efficiently, we Socialists were on the wrong track. We were trying to pull down when we ought to have been trying to lift up. What struck Herbert was that *he* ought to have been trained to act as Macdonald acted, not that Macdonald ought to have been levelled down to act like Herbert, or rather not to act at all."

"That seems quite reasonable," Kintyre once more came near them to say.

Mrs. Pett looked him in the eyes. "But don't you make any mistakes," she said. "You aren't going to sit on your pedestals alone. We're going to climb up and sit beside you."

"I should think that would be rather pleasant for us," the Duke said amiably.

But Mrs. Pett went on with her remarks. "What struck

Herbert," she said again, 'was that it was downright waste to have to have Macdonald running about in the mud of socialist meetings. It struck him that humanity had spent millions of pounds and millions of lives to train him to be the chivalrous and self-sacrificing creature that he is. Then what was the good of our spending just about as many efforts to undo what humanity has unconsciously been doing for ages? What we've got to do, Herbert said—I remember his coming home on the night after the bus accident, and—What we've got to do, he said, is to level up, not to level down. 'For,' he said, 'if a system of society can breed an animal as finely adapted to the needs of society as Macdonald is, then that type of society is what we want to preserve, not to destroy.'"

Kintyre came near her for long enough to say: "It's very gratifying to hear you talk like this."

"Ah! but wait a minute," Mrs. Pett commanded, and the Duke stood still. "Don't you make any mistakes. We aren't going to give *carte blanche* to all aristocrats. Those of you who don't act up to your standards will be weeded out. It will be like breeding prize animals. Those that don't come up to standard will be fattened off and killed at once. They won't be used for breeding from."

"Well, I'm not married, you know," the Duke said.

Mrs. Pett paid no more attention to him. She turned once more upon Lady Aldington.

"Of course," she said, "Herbert in the book he's writing backs up his theory with innumerable instances after the manner of Weissmann. But that's what it amounts to, and that's why we sent Macdonald back into the service of the Grand Duke. And that's why Macdonald is going to restore that king to the throne."

"What king?" Lady Aldington asked innocently.

"Oh, I thought you'd be sure to know," Mrs. Pett said.

"Oh, you silly ass, Anne!" Mr. Pett said. "Now you *have* let the cat out of the bag."

Mrs. Pett pulled her gloves on a little further. "I don't suppose I've done any harm," she said composedly. "I dare say I've done good. And I'm quite sure that none of the parties here will let the matter go any further because I've let it out by a slip." . .

"I knew all about it already," Kintyre exclaimed amiably. "The Grand Duke told me about it in Count Macdonald's presence yesterday afternoon."

"Then we can rely upon you," Mrs. Pett said.

"As for me," Aldington grunted suddenly, "I can't make head or tail of what you are all talking about."

"Then we can rely on *you*," Mrs. Pett said pleasantly, as if she were talking to a large schoolboy.

"Then it's only me," Lady Aldington said, "that you can't rely on."

"Oh, I'd rely on you if I had to answer for it with my head," Mrs. Pett answered Emily, and Emily said:

"Now, that's very kind of you, my dear."

"And why I think I've done some good is this," Mrs. Pett continued. "Count Macdonald is so shy of asking favours of his particular friends—of his really close friends—that I dare say he would never have asked you to help him at all. Now I think you'll ask him yourself how you can help him. And you can be of the very greatest help."

"I can't be called, you know," Lady Aldington said softly, "a really close friend of Count Macdonald's. I hardly know him."

Mrs. Pett looked at her gloves. "You're kindred natures," she said.

"Oh, come," Lady Aldington laughed. "I can't be called chivalrous and self-sacrificing. I never acted nobly on top of an omnibus. I was never on top of an omnibus in my life."

Mrs. Pett continued to look at her gloves. Lord Aldington grinned suddenly.

"I shouldn't wonder," Mrs. Pett said, "supposing we could get to the bottom of your heart, if you weren't leading a life of intense self-sacrifice all the time. I don't know about that. But I do know that you will behave nobly one of these days."

Lord Aldington suddenly burst into a guffaw. But Lady Aldington said: "I hope I shall."

II

THE Grand Duke had accompanied the Macdonalds down to the train at Wiesbaden. Dressed in a heavy tweed and with an immense panama hat, he stood, swinging his walking-stick behind his back and looking up with his enigmatic, heavy smile at Countess Macdonald. All around him, behind his back, was the half-circle of detectives who unobtrusively permitted no one that they did not know to pass between themselves and their imperial ward. The Macdonalds were already in their carriage.

"Supposing," the Countess said to her husband, "that you let the window down? I want to talk to Nicholas Alexandrovitch."

Sergius Mihailovitch smiled his perpetual light smile that she found so irritating because she could never understand whether he was or wasn't finding her ridiculous.

"Nicholas Alexandrovitch wants to talk to me, too," she said.

And then she perceived, passing unconsciously between the ring of detectives, the rather tall figure of a quite English-looking, fair woman. By a minute stiffening of the lines of Macdonald's eyes, she became instantly aware that Sergius Mihailovitch knew this woman and that he admired her.

"Who's that?" she said.

Macdonald was engaged in struggling with the strap of the large plate-glass window.

"That?" he said. "Oh, that's Lady Aldington."

Countess Macdonald just said: "Oh!"

And then behind Lady Aldington she perceived the knickerbockered form of Mr. Pett, whom the detectives regarded with suspicion; Mrs. Pett, in her ill-fitting costume of white canvas; Kintyre, long, tall, and sallow; and the shapeless figure of Aldington himself, who had a certain resemblance to the Grand Duke.

"What are the Petts doing with that atrocious woman?" Countess Macdonald said.

"I introduced them, you know," Sergius Mihailovitch answered.

And again his wife said, "Oh!"

The Grand Duke evidently did want to talk to Macdonald's wife, for he was making signs with his heavily gloved hands.

"Oh, get the window down," the Countess said angrily. "You're unbearably clumsy."

And just then the large window fell like a guillotine.

"I wanted to tell you," the Grand Duke said immediately, "that you've left something precious behind you. Not as precious, of course, as Your Excellency's remembrances . . ."

"What's all this about?" the Countess said.

The chief of the station marched up to His Imperial Highness and, holding his hand stiffly to the brim of his cap, desired to say that it was time for the Nord Express to continue on its way. The Grand Duke, gazing hard at him, did not perceive him. He turned half round instead and beckoned, and a man in a chauffeur's uniform came towards him, bearing a substantial-looking book, like a brick bound in curtain chintz. The Duke balanced it in his large hands.

"I should present it, you know," he said, "to the British Museum Library."

"But, of course, they've got a copy," the Countess said.

"Oh—but put a label on it: 'This volume was expounded by Her Excellency Countess Macdonald to'—to me, in fact."

"But I never had time to expound it to you," the Countess said.

"Couldn't you," His Imperial Highness uttered, "get Macdonald to leave you behind to go on with the exposition?"

The Countess looked hard into the great man's eyes. "Of course I could," she said slowly.

Behind her back Sergius Mihailovitch grinned suddenly at his master.

"You've got it now, Imperial Highness," he motioned with his lips in Russian; and the Grand Duke said sharply to the station-master:

"The train may proceed."

The station-master bowed nearly to the ground.

The Duke looked seriously into Sergius Mihailovitch's eyes. "I wish you," he said, "entire success in both your enterprises. In both."

"Oh, come! Imperial Highness," Macdonald said gaily, "why not make it all three? Remember the motor car business."

The faint flicker of a smile showed in the Duke's square beard.

"*I'm* interested in the lampreys of the Don," he said. "I haven't forgotten that you're to write and telegraph if you can or if you can't get them."

"Imperial Highness has a good memory this morning," Macdonald said.

"Oh, I'm a regular Bourbon sometimes," the Duke answered. "But the point is that I'm interested in lampreys. And you're interested in—what was it Kintyre

said?—the owner of tin and cobalt. But I don't see who's interested in motor cars."

Macdonald looked gaily at his wife. "Oh, it's Her Excellency who's interested in motor cars," he said. "It's *she* who wants me to be of use in the world."

The Countess looked hard at the Grand Duke. "I do wish you'd sometimes be in earnest, Nicholas Alexandrovitch," she said.

The Duke slapped his thick leg with his walking-stick. "Excellency," he said, "I'm tremendously in earnest about the lampreys of the Don—and as for that excellent fellow your husband, I fancy you'll find him tremendously in earnest about tin and cobalt. So you will probably have to look after the motor cars."

The train, with its imperceptible movement, was gliding away, and the Grand Duke raised his voice to call again to Sergius Mihailovitch:

"Good luck, my good fellow, in all your enterprises!"

Sergius Mihailovitch pulled up the window.

"You might just as well have left it down," the Countess said.

Sergius Mihailovitch answered pleasantly: "If you look at the inscription, you can see that this window is only allowed to be opened in the case of pressing danger."

"You're the most irritating man I've ever met!" his wife said. "You know perfectly well I shall stifle."

Macdonald stood up and surveyed the luggage rack. "What books are you going to read?" he said.

The Countess looked down at the chintz-covered volume in her lap.

"I shall read this," she announced.

Macdonald sank into his own corner with a gay satisfaction. "Then that's all right," he said.

"It certainly isn't," his wife answered. "I want all this explained."

"Well, I'm always here," Macdonald said.

"I want explained," the Countess uttered slowly, "how you came to know that atrocious woman."

"Lady Aldington?" Macdonald raised his eyebrows to ask. "What's she done?"

"I was hearing about her from Miss Sutton," the Countess said determinedly. "She was the abandoned woman who lived at Harpurhey. She did . . ."

"But, my dear," Macdonald said, "it was Lady Blagdon who lived at Harpurhey."

"Of course," his wife answered, "you know all about these hateful creatures. They're the very worst set in England."

"But really, you know," Macdonald said, "Lady Aldington isn't in any set at all that I know of. She holds the receptions for the Liberal Minister of the Fine Arts. The Aldingtons are a great Whig family."

"I suppose I know more about English families than you do," the Countess answered. "What are we going to England in such a hurry for?"

And then, with his splendid imprudence, Macdonald made the mistake of his life. He had never really learnt that the truth is a dangerous thing.

"I'm not any longer, you know," he said, "in the Grand Duke's service."

A great rush of colour ran all over the Countess's cheeks. For a moment her chest heaved in the speechless struggle for words. Then :

"What are we to live on?" she said.

Macdonald laughed. "I'm on my own, as you would say," he answered. "I'm going to be of some use in the world. You've been telling me that that was my duty for the last fifteen years."

"You were getting on so splendidly with Nicholas Alexandrovitch," the lady answered.

"But you," he encountered her, "were perpetually telling me that I was an idle parasite who did nothing but carry bouquets to Madame Sassonoff."

"It's useless," his wife said, "to make you understand anything. How did you come to meet Lady Aldington?"

"I've met her twice at the opera," Macdonald answered, "and once at the Baroness's."

"You know perfectly well," his wife answered, "that I never wanted you to go to the opera. You know perfectly well that I have to be in bed by ten every night. It's part of the general unfeelingness of your general conduct."

"But, bless my soul," Macdonald said, "I was in attendance. I had my duties."

"Pack of nonsense!" the Countess answered. "You could have got out of it perfectly well if you'd wanted to. And it shows the sort of woman that that Lady Aldington is, that you should have met her at the Grand Duke's mistresses."

Macdonald laughed once more. "If only," he said, "you wouldn't think all the while in terms of Putney, S.W."

"Everyone knows," his wife answered, "that she's his mistress."

"Everyone knows," Macdonald said, "that fire is the mistress of water. Don't you understand that Madame Sassonoff is the most dangerous of Nicholas Alexandrovitch's enemies? Don't you understand that Nicholas Alexandrovitch has got all the vices in the world, but that the chief agent of the secret . . . Well, it's no use talking."

"No, it's no use talking," his wife answered. "If Lady Aldington were a respectable woman she wouldn't call upon the Baroness."

And just at that moment a gentleman with a blue-shaven face, black eyebrows and a black bow, swayed into

the compartment from the corridor and placed a card in the Countess's hand. He did his best to bow, but the shaking of the train threw him almost on to the seat.

"Her ladyship's compliments," he exclaimed, "and will your ladyship and his lordship come to lunch with her ladyship in her saloon at one o'clock. The train will stop at Rudesheim at five to one, so that it will be steady for your ladyship to walk along the corridors."

The Countess glared at her husband. Macdonald smiled at the servant.

"Of course we'll come," he said. "Thank Lady Aldington."

"I'll come and warn your lordship," the servant answered, "ten minutes before we come to Rudesheim."

The servant went away, and immediately the lady threw the card almost into Macdonald's face.

"I shall certainly not go," she said. "Look what's written on that card."

The card fluttered under the opposite seat.

"Oh, you needn't go on your knees to it," the Countess exclaimed. "She's written 'Do come,' and underlined the 'Do.' That's what she's written."

"Well, I suppose she wants to make your acquaintance," Macdonald said.

"But, don't you see," his wife exclaimed, "that it's an atrocious impertinence? It's my business to call upon her, not hers to visit me."

"Oh, come! . . ." Macdonald said.

"Mine is the higher title," his wife exclaimed.

"It's quite a nice point," Macdonald laughed. "Abroad it's perfectly true that English calling rules are reversed, so that you would call on her if yours was the higher title. But then she's the Duchess of Batalha."

"Who cares?" the Countess said, "for these potty foreign titles?"

"Well, who does?" Macdonald answered.

The Countess opened her book and read four lines. "I shall certainly not go," she added. "You can make up your mind to that."

"Then I must go," Macdonald said, "and say that you are overcome by train sickness."

"Then what will they think," the lady said, "of a man who leaves his wife when she is ill to go and revel in the luxuries of the smart set?"

"I don't suppose," Macdonald said, "that I care, as you would say, a damn for what they think. I should care if you were ill. But you won't be, you know."

The Countess turned her eyes frigidly down upon her book.

"I can only say," she commented, "that I disapprove of the whole thing, and there's an end of it."

Macdonald smiled gaily out of the window at the immense slow reaches of the Rhine. A long silence reigned; the train, smooth and purposeful, ran on almost without noise. And then, quite suddenly, the Countess began to speak with a wildness of passion.

"What does it all mean?" she asked. "I don't understand it! When I first knew you I could influence you. Now it seems that my influence over you has passed away. Why? What does it all mean? Why don't you think as I think any more? It's terrible, all this! It's killing me."

Touched by a pathetic—a nearly tragic note in her voice, Macdonald hesitated for a moment.

"I don't know," he said. "It's a mystery. Or it isn't. But it's no good talking about it."

"You *ought* to think as I do," she said. "You did so once. Now you don't. Your whole mind is taken up with vanities . . . with frivolities."

"They're only the symbols, you know," he said gently.

"But what are they the symbols of?" she asked, with

a desolate rising in her voice. "Only of things that I don't stand for. Only of things that are despicable. Why have you changed? For you've utterly changed. I know nothing of you now. Why do you shut up all your thoughts from me? Haven't I always been ready to help you?"

He looked at her with a sudden nervousness. "No," he said at last, "you have never been ready to help me. Never to anything that I wanted. You have wanted to keep me down to your . . ."

"But what have you wanted?" she uttered, with a tragic exasperation. "What more could you have wanted? I have kept a house together for you whilst you have been dissipating your means on disastrous follies. I have struggled . . ."

"My dear," he said, "it was you who pushed me to these disastrous follies. Or no! that's not quite fair to you. But you approved of them. I should not have 'dissipated my means' if the process had not had your approval. I don't throw it up in your face, but don't throw it up in mine."

"But what are you going to do?" she asked. "What are we going to live on?"

"I am nominated an extra aide-de-camp to the Emperor," he answered; "there will be two thousand a year for you. I should never have taken the place if I had not had the duty to provide for you."

"And you," she said sharply, "what do you make out of it?"

"Did you ever know me make anything out of anything?" he asked slowly.

"You're so changed," she answered. "How do I know that you may not be changed in that too? You are always running about with these dissolute people."

"I shall make nothing out of it," he commented. "There will be the money for you. And rooms at the Embassy."

"And do you think I can live at the Embassy," she asked violently, "in that insanitary place with all those dissolute or idle persons?"

"I don't know," he answered. "You can if you elect to. You have the right. But it's generally only regarded as a form of words, and you draw an allowance for lodgings."

"And what about you?" she asked fiercely. "You speak as if we had no interests in common."

"It doesn't matter about me," he said.

Again she directed one of her long, hard glances at him. "You mean that we are no longer to live together?" she asked slowly.

"It's altogether in your hands," he answered. "If you think that your dignity asks for the tribute of my presence, I shall be there."

"It's impossible that we should go on living together!" she exclaimed; and from a faint smile, full of hatred, that was round the corners of her mouth, he knew that she was setting a trap for him. He did not, however, care to temporise, and he replied simply:

"I think that I must agree with you at last. I have never wanted to, as you know. But I think it has come to that at last. I can't stand these continual discussions. I am at this moment at the end of my tether."

"You're always saying that," she retorted contemptuously. "If you were a man instead of what you are, you would show some signs of excitement. I simply don't believe that you are feeling any sort of excitement at all. You are incapable of feeling."

"I am sitting here and you are insulting me," Macdonald said. "Of course I am quiet. But take it which way you will. Either your insults reach me, in which case you are killing me, or else I am so indifferent to you that you do not exist for me. In either case the inference is the same."

"You mean that we must part?" she asked from a dry throat.

"You've been asking for it for years," he rejoined.

She said, in so low a voice that it seemed as if she were reflecting upon some distant prospect:

"You have never spoken to me like that before."

"It had to come," he answered.

And she knew him well enough to recognise that though his voice was as low as her own he was certainly labouring under intense excitement. Indeed, she knew that, with what she called his effeminately excitable nature, he was probably on the verge of being so unmanned as to risk an illness. She didn't therefore raise her voice when she leaned forward rather stiffly to ask:

"And how, then, are we to live?"

"You, of course," he answered, "will live just as you please. There's that money."

"But you," she asked, "what are you going to live on? And where?"

"I really haven't thought of it," he said.

"Think of it now," she answered.

"I have only had time to think of you," he said.

"I can manage for myself very well," she said. "But I insist on knowing what you intend to do."

"I'm going," he said, with a slight hesitation, "to manage the London branch of the Resiliens Motor Company. I understand there's a room in their offices that I can have. I dare say you can let me have a bed. Or I can buy one. I haven't thought about it more than that." His voice tailed off into irresolution.

"You know," she said distinctly, "that I have always disapproved of motor cars."

"I didn't know," he answered. "There are so many things you disapprove of."

"They are simply a luxury of the idle rich," she said.

"Oh, come," he answered. "The company that is employing me sells as many heavy waggons for goods as it does private cars."

"I don't approve of it," she repeated definitely. "And you must understand distinctly that if you take this up I shall regard it as a sign that you want to break with me for good."

"It won't be that," he said vaguely.

"I shall regard it as that," she answered ; and he slightly opened his hands in a little gesture that said that he could not help it.

"You've told me again and again," he said, "for years . . . that I ought to be of use in the world. Now I'm going to do it. Besides, I am going to make a living."

"There are better ways of making a living," she said, and gradually her contemptuousness was growing too strong for her. "Worthier ways than by becoming a parasite of the idle rich. Besides, there is the income you have spoken of from the Russian Government."

"I don't choose," he replied, "to take an income from my country for doing nothing."

"But you think I'm contemptible enough to take it?" she asked bitterly.

"It's obviously my duty to make you the offer," he answered. "I should prefer you not to take it. But I have no right to ask you to share hardships for the sake of my conscience when we are no longer in sympathy."

"I certainly should not think of doing so," she answered. And then, as before, she dropped into a long reflection. Suddenly she exclaimed :

"This woman . . ." and then she stopped again.

"There isn't any woman," Macdonald said in a tone of intense weariness. "What has put it into your head that there is a woman?"

"It's your idea, then"—she evaded his question—"it's your idea that at Charing Cross we drive off in separate cabs? I go to Putney and you to wherever your offices are?"

"I haven't any idea at all," he replied. "All I have said is that if you're still of opinion that we can't live together any more . . ."

"No, I can't stand you," she answered; "you are maddening to me. Everything you say. Everything you think."

"Then we may as well drive off in separate cabs," he said.

She waited for him to say more and at last she asked: "And that's all?" There was in her tone an extraordinary ironic laughter and bitterness.

"That's all," Macdonald repeated wearily. "If you think that your dignity requires me to live with you, we can occupy the same suite in the Embassy or anywhere else that's fairly well in town. It will not suit my position to go on living in Putney."

"You know very well," she answered hatefully, "that I can't and won't live in town. I will not countenance unsanitary conditions with my presence among them. It would be against my conscience. You are determined to cut yourself off from me by suggesting it."

"You suggested it yourself, you know," Macdonald said. "I have stood out against the idea for years. It's I that have kept us together."

"I dare say," she said incredulously. Her tone roused an uncontrollable moment of anger in her husband.

"But this is intolerable," he said. And his eyes gleamed dangerously. "Do you mean to say you have never suggested that we should separate? Do you dare to say it?"

"Well, you need not swear at me," she said. "All that

I am pointing out now is that you are not very eager to retain my society. Of course, when I made those proposals before I was only setting a trap for you. I had a right to set a trap for you. You have always deceived me. . . It is impossible that you should have had the ideas you have had lately and have moved in the society you've frequented without becoming deceitful. I can't say that I have found you out in any specific lies, but Conservative ideas and the smart set go with it."

"But how can you," Macdonald asked in a voice that was almost a groan—"how can you use a phraseology that is so intolerably vulgar? Or how can we live together if you will? You have surely—haven't you?—lived for long enough with my friends to know that you can't express these things in the language of the cheap newspapers."

"You have Conservative ideas, and you live with the smart set now," the Countess said coldly. "You can't get away from that, whatever language I was refined enough to use. And you want to get rid of me now in order to plunge into a whirl of dissipation. Do you suppose I don't know enough of the world to know what your having a room at your office means?"

Macdonald really groaned. The train was slowing down and running so close to the bank of the Rhine that only the water was visible from the carriage window.

"Of course, if it was only a trap," he said, "if you did not really want us to separate, there's an end of the matter. And if you insist upon it, I will manage to live in Putney or one of the other suburbs."

The train had almost stopped; the blue-shaven face and the black eyebrows of Lady Aldington's footman appeared in the doorway of the compartment.

"We're running into Rudesheim, my lord," he said.

"If you think," the Countess said in her clear level tones, "that I intend to force my society on you when you

are hankering after another woman, you are entirely mistaken. There was a time when I used to think you were a fine man and had a noble character. Sometimes I think now that you only boast of these debaucheries and talk of these women in order to impress me. But if you think that you are entirely mistaken. All they make me do is to wish to have done with you for good."

The footman repeated expressionlessly that they were running into Rudesheim. Macdonald was sitting huddled up in his seat. He had no colour at all in his lips. The footman stood with his face like a wooden mask, as if he were correctly waiting at a table where private matters were being discussed. Upon Macdonald himself his wife's tongue, her mannerisms, the flow of her voice, acted with an enervating physical effect. It seemed at the same time to stop his heart, to set an immense weight upon his skull as if for many nights he had been deprived of sleep, and to render his limbs numb and heavy. At the moment he could not have trusted himself to raise a hand.

"You think," his wife's voice droned on, "that you have deceived me about this woman. Do you suppose that I have not any eyes in my head? Do you suppose that if it had not been for her you would ever have had the courage to tell me that you wanted to separate? Do you suppose that I do not know the shilly-shallying creature that you are? Do you suppose that I did not see your eyes fall upon her just now? Do you suppose that I did not know at once? What do you men suppose we women are made of? You will tell me that you have only seen her three times, and that you have told me how you travelled with her in the train? You will say that you have been strictly truthful, and that I ought to have been deceived? I dare say you will tell me that you never so much as wanted to kiss the doll of a creature that it is. And I dare say it is true enough. That is the sort of effeminate creature

that you are, and you will call it chivalry or honour. But you cannot take me in : you want to get rid of me because of that woman. That is what has given you courage. You would call it strength. . . . Yes, I can see that this servant hears. And why not ? Sooner or later you have to let corrupt creatures like that into your secrets. They have to do the fetching and carrying of your mean lives. So why not sooner instead of later ? ”

The train had come to a standstill.

“ This is Rudesheim, my lord,” the footman said. “ Lunch will be served in five minutes.”

The Countess rose, rigid and precise.

“ Tell your mistress we are coming immediately,” she said ; and as the footman disappeared she turned again upon her husband. “ I am going to see what sort of a creature has supplanted me,” she said. “ Did you think I had not the courage ? And as you have said you wanted it, so let it be. We will take separate cabs at Charing Cross. I never want to see your imbecile face again. I never want to hear your imbecile voice speaking to me again. You can write me a formal letter to make business arrangements again, and that will be the end.” She trailed between the seats towards the door. Then she stopped to say : “ You need not be in that state of idiotic fear. I am not going to make that woman a scene. I can remember that I am a lady. Besides, I have done with you. You are free. But I reserve to myself the right of curiosity. I want to understand what sort of painted fool it is that has taken a useless creature like you to her heart. Or perhaps she has not even taken you to her heart ? I don’t ask.”

She turned once more, and then once again seemed to hang over Macdonald, and her eyes were full of large tears :

“ What does it all mean ? ” she asked pitifully. “ Why have these creatures such power ? They use all sorts of

aids to beauty that any eye can see through. They are idle ; they are frivolous ; they have not an idea in their heads. What are they compared to a woman like me ? What do you see in them ? How do they attract you ? It's a mystery ; it's all a mystery." She twisted her black-gloved hands painfully, and then suddenly she added : " But if you think I want to keep you, you are mightily mistaken. We have spoken our last word. I have done with you, for I despise you. You have broken my faith in man. You have broken my heart. This is my last word." And with her head erect, her silhouette marched down the corridor of the train in the direction that the footman had taken.

III

THE train being very late, it was a quarter-past six before they all reached Charing Cross. There was a great crowd and many cries, but Macdonald saw his wife into one cab and promised to send her things after her by another, as soon as they were through the Customs. She did not speak a word to him ; she didn't even look at him ; but gloomily and rather angularly she seemed to fall back into the hansom and to be wheeled out of sight.

Macdonald felt in all his limbs an impression of lightness. The weight of years seemed for the minute to fall away from him ; but he had too many things to attend to. He saw Lady Aldington going away up the platform ; Mr. Pett was shouting in his ear ; a porter was asking him for his keys, and appeared to be beseeching him with a quite disproportionate anxiety not to go away from the barrier. And even when Macdonald was in his cab it was difficult to find Little Walden Street, all he knew of it being that it was a cul-de-sac approximately behind the Post Office in Regent Street. So that, really, he had not thought at all by the time they drew up in a stony place with square buildings of liver-coloured brick encasing grimly an ugly court. Upon the asphalt were from three to four motor cars standing, like monsters of the slime age, before the open and silent doors of the ugly garages.

A man in a peaked cap, with rubber overalls, approached Sergius Mihailovitch in the fading light. He had a quiet

and grating voice, so that Macdonald considered that they could not be heard by the cabman on his high box.

"I'd almost given your lordship up," he said. "I'm His Majesty's . . ."

"Oh, say Mr. Spenlow's chauffeur."

The chauffeur said: "How, my lord?"

"Well, help me in with my things," Macdonald said.

"In here?" the chauffeur asked incredulously.

"If it's the office of the Resiliens Company," Macdonald answered.

The chauffeur got Macdonald's two portmanteaux down from the hansom, and with an expert air dragged them over the pavement and into the dim doorway of the show-room. Macdonald looked round him in a pause of reflection. The show-room was dusky in the waning light, for no reflections of afterglow came from the brown, tall buildings outside, and in this dusk a double procession of motor cars seemed to mount backwards into the positive darkness of the rear, two and two with a sort of aisle between, in the middle of which stood Macdonald and his companion with the baggage at their feet.

"Now, what hotel shall I drive your lordship to?" the chauffeur asked. "You've not overmuch time to dress in. His Majesty expects us at eight."

"I can't be there till nine," Macdonald replied. "You had better telephone to him. What's your name?"

"My name's Salt," the chauffeur answered.

"Oh, you're the man he can't get on without?"

"If your lordship means that His Majesty has told me what the plan is, I am," the man answered. He was small, lean, querulous, and rather dark in aspect.

"And don't you think His Majesty is a damned fool?" Macdonald asked.

"For telling me?" the man asked in turn. He reflected for a moment. "Yes, I do," he said. "He isn't going

to lose by it, as it happens. But he might. He's a fool for that."

"It's satisfactory to learn that he isn't going to lose by it," Macdonald answered.

"Of course, I'm not going to say that I would lay down my life for the King," the chauffeur began again. "But I've recognised that politically as well as practically what I stand for is the same as what he stands for."

"Well, that's satisfactory, too," Macdonald commented. "You aren't asked to lay down your life. You aren't asked to do any more than your duty, and to hold your tongue about it when it's done."

"Of course, I'm always ready to oblige as between man and man as long as it's not anything below my place that I'm asked to do. Not that I ever do get asked to do anything that's below."

"You wouldn't be," Macdonald answered. "We're all of us afraid of our chauffeurs. You're a priestly caste. You observed that I did not ask you to take my things out of the cab, but to help me with them. You pulled the portmanteaux, and I carried my kitbags and the wraps."

"I did not particularly notice it," Mr. Salt said. "It's so much the usual thing."

Macdonald sat down on the step of one of the cars. "Let us settle one or two things," he said. "I suppose if all goes well we shall see a good deal of each other just because the King has told you things."

He added, "I wish he had not, but he has."

"You won't lose by it," Mr. Salt reassured him.

"I don't suppose that we shall," Macdonald replied. "But it makes you more difficult to keep in your place. All you are asked to do is to drive cars."

"A first-rate mechanic has not any place, you know," Mr. Salt reminded him. "He's always just where he stands. By birth I'm as good as Nelson. His father was

a clergyman ; mine's a Methodist minister. At present I'm the King of Galizia's tutor."

"In fact, you're just the sort of chap it's the most difficult to keep in his place," Macdonald said. "The sort of metallic man that Cromwell turned into an Iron-side."

"Ah," Mr. Salt answered. "But reading the works of Mr. Pett and hearing him talk has made me see that I stand by the King. The skilled mechanic—and you said we were a caste yourself—he has not any place in a levelled-down democracy. It's taken hundreds of centuries to develop us, and we should be sacrificed to unskilled labour if modern tendencies went on. But we run the world. You can't get away from the fact that we run the world. And we aren't going to be levelled down. We're a privileged class, and it's the duty of the privileged classes to stand together. That's what Mr. Shaw does not see."

"Mr. Who?" Macdonald asked.

"Shaw," the chauffeur repeated; "G.B.S., him who used to write the musical criticisms for the *Star*, and now writes smartish plays. I'm not saying anything against his plays, but about his power of thinking. Take 'Enery Straker! I don't mind admitting that I've modelled myself on 'Enery Straker. Such as you see me, he has had a great influence on my manners. But not on my career or my political ideas. Oh no! I'm not one of your flannel-nightgowned woolly Fabians. Money's been spent on me by way of training. I'm a vested interest as I stand here. Just as much as you are, I am. That's what Mr. Shaw didn't foresee. You may try to set up a democracy by education, but the moment you make a trained class you make a privileged one that's interested in maintaining Society as it is. Take doctors, take priests, take attorneys—they all rise from the same class as myself; but you can't find a more Conservative or reactionary lot if you look for

them with a ninety-Diogenes power headlight from now till Michaelmas."

Macdonald nodded absent-mindedly, uttering with a sort of mechanical politeness the words: "That's good; that's good."

The chauffeur went on to say that the world had been run a great deal too long for the benefit of the weak and the unfit. That was the wrong reading of democracy. A man had to make his place, and his place was where he made it; and he was not—when he was the produce of the development of thousands of years—to be levelled out of it because of the divine right of some incapable members of the lower classes, the powerless classes, who hadn't any more right than that of having been born to incompetent fathers by incapable mothers. It wasn't, in Mr. Salt's opinion, because you just happened to have come into the world whining and by keeping up the whining that you acquired any rights except to a lethal chamber. We all whined when we came into the world, and the privilege was the property of the man who stopped whining, not of the one who went on till his miserable dying day. That was how he looked at it, thanks very largely to the writing of Mr. Pett in the *Daily Herald*. They had been hoodwinked too long by people who made themselves powerful by exploiting the whines of the useless in a picturesque way. But they had had to come down to solid facts, and as far as he was concerned anything that even looked like reaction was going to have his sympathy and his support as long as it did not interfere with the rights of skilled mechanics.

Macdonald, who had been listening vaguely, pulled himself together to say:

"Oh, you see for yourself how little chance there is of anyone's being able to do that." And then he asked: "There are two rooms here? I suppose there is not such a thing as a bed in them?"

Mr. Salt shook his head.

"There's a table and some office furniture in one," he said. "That's above ground. The other's in the basement on the level of the mews behind. But there's nothing in it but some straw."

"Well, let's look at the room with the straw," Macdonald said. "I rather think that is going to be the theatre of my dreams to-night. That's a Russian way of saying that it's where I shall sleep."

"Your lordship likes your joke," the chauffeur said.

"No, I'm an idealist," Macdonald said. "That is going to be a symbol. We begin the regeneration of the world from some straw in a room on the level of the mews."

"If your lordship is going to have time to get to your hotel! . . ." the chauffeur exclaimed.

"I can't afford hotels," Macdonald answered, "or, if I can to-day, the dark forest of the future alone knows whether I shall be able to the day after to-morrow."

"I don't understand your lordship," Mr. Salt said.

"Of course you don't," Macdonald answered. "If you did you would be leading this movement, not I. You've got one gift. You're the best chauffeur in Europe, so they say. But, you know, I can drive a car almost as well as you can. And I can say things that you cannot understand. That's why I am the leader."

"I could say things you couldn't understand," the chauffeur muttered.

Macdonald stood up. "Oh no, you couldn't," he answered. "Try."

The chauffeur stood puzzled for a moment.

"I could if the things would come into my head," he ejaculated.

"But they never do and they never will," Macdonald laughed at him. "You're an aristocrat with only one

gift. I'm an idealist with fifty." He picked up his kitbags and said: "Come along."

The shadows of the back of the show-room swallowed them up.

There were no shadows about the room in the basement on a level with the mews behind. A single drop of electric light at the end of a wire lit it up. The walls were the bare plaster; on the boards were a few straws from departed packing cases.

"Your lordship can't sleep here," the chauffeur said in a tone between triumph and shockedness. Macdonald dropped his kitbags on to the ground. He stood smiling round upon the room and soothing Mr. Salt with little motions of his hands.

"Don't interrupt a general in his meditations on the battlefield," he said. "I shall have to fight with devils here."

"It's not my idea of comfort," the chauffeur grumbled between his teeth.

"It wouldn't be," Macdonald answered gaily.

"It's not fitting; it's not proper," Mr. Salt protested; "it's not even sanitary. There's sure to be a smell from the mews."

"Now," Macdonald said, "can you get me a bed? Buy one at a shop and bring it here on your car?"

"The shops are all shut at this time of night," the chauffeur still grumbled.

"Now, my good chap," Macdonald said, "if you think you are going to make me do what you think is fitting and proper by being disobliging, I shall kick you through the door and there's an end of you. And, as you are dying of curiosity, that isn't what I want to do."

"How do you know I'm dying of curiosity?" the chauffeur grumbled.

"It's my business to know men," Macdonald said.

"And when you speak to me, call me Your Excellency. That's my title. And when you speak of the King, call him Mr. Spenlow. Now oblige me by going into the mews and asking for two bundles of straw—to make my bed."

"Your lordship! . . . Your Excellency! . . ." the man protested.

"Get out and fetch the straw," Macdonald grumbled amiably. "I know you've taken to me immensely, and you think a nobleman of my rank ought to be protected from himself in the matter of curtains and carpets."

"Oh, you're too much!" the man ejaculated.

"Well, I've broken you in," Macdonald laughed, as the man went irresolutely from the room.

Macdonald climbed lightly up the circular iron staircase into the office. He fetched down two chairs, a box with nails that was in a tool chest, a hammer, a looking-glass, and a large almanac that showed a blonde woman stretching out her arms yearningly to an approaching automobile. He put a row of eight nails along the wall nearest the door, two nails above the window, and one in the centre of the wall. On this he hung the almanac. The chauffeur was grunting and rustling into the room, bundling behind him through the door a huge mass of straw. He cast it on to the ground.

"This almanac," Macdonald said, "is not intended to keep me posted as to the flight of time. And it is not intended to impress you with anything, because, as you have gathered, I affect to disdain your opinion. I've stuck it up there to make a pretty spot of colour and to remind myself that I am not an ascetic. I want to get all the pretty spots of colour that I can. On principle."

"You've got a damned sharp tongue, Your Excellency," the man muttered.

"Normally, I haven't," Macdonald said; "but I'm just showing how immeasurably I'm your superior."

The chauffeur grumbled rather beneath his breath: "All men are equals."

"Now, no more of that antiquated nonsense," Macdonald said sharply. "No men are equal. You are not mine, and the chap driving the taxi from the next rank isn't yours, and the cab-washer in his garage isn't his, so drop it. Help me to get this room straight."

But this was almost more than the capacity of Mr. Salt would run to. With his hands hanging by his sides and an expression of half-admiring helplessness, he set to work. Sergius Mihailovitch arranged the two bundles of straw side by side in the corner of the room. Over them he spread one of his rugs, and over the rug his motor-coat.

"That's my bed," he exclaimed.

Another rug he hung up before his bare window. "That's a curtain." He undid his valises and took out suit after suit, which he hung on the nails that he had knocked into the bare walls. One of the suits was a diplomatic uniform of dark blue, with buttons and with epaulettes of shining gold. "That's how we do it," he said again.

The chauffeur's bewildered eyes rested on the decorations of the uniform.

"Oh, come," Macdonald exclaimed, "you've seen something like that before. Come! Move! Do you feel up to helping me down with the small table from the office upstairs?"

They climbed the corkscrew steps and clumsily managed to get the table down. Macdonald set it against the wall beneath the coloured almanac.

"Now, here's the furnished room," he exclaimed. "There's a place to wash one's self underneath the stairs, so that's all I want."

The chauffeur began: "But Your Excellency isn't——?"

"My Excellency is," Macdonald said. "My Excellency

is going to dress for dinner now, and my Excellency is going to sleep here when I come back after dinner."

He took from a portmanteau some silken underclothing, a dress shirt, a tie-case, and a collar box, and laid them carefully upon the table.

"Now, tell me about Mr. Spenlow," he said, "whilst I am putting the studs in my shirt."

"His Majesty——" the chauffeur began.

"I've told you to call the King Mr. Spenlow," Macdonald said sharply.

"But it's very difficult to call His Majesty . . ."

"By God!" Macdonald shouted suddenly, "if you ever call the King anything else but Mr. Spenlow, I will tear the inside out of your throat." And his aspect was so ferocious that Mr. Salt staggered back against the door.

"Good Lord!" he said. "I've heard of the British Lion, but protect me from the Russian Bear."

"That's better," Macdonald commented. "You seem to be coming to some sense of responsibility. You understand this. This is a matter of life and death, and it will be your death that will happen first if there is any bungling."

"I didn't take on a life-and-death job," the chauffeur grumbled.

"Well, you're in one," Macdonald retorted. "I didn't want you, but it seems I've got to have you. Now, tell me all about the habits of the gentleman we've been talking of. You've told me that he's passionately interested in motor cars, and that's a good thing. What about women?"

"Women?" the chauffeur asked stupidly.

"Yes, women," Macdonald answered impatiently. "Wine, women, and song! Dissipation! Don't you understand English? Hasn't he got the vices proper to his station?"

"He's a most respectable young chap," the chauffeur

said. "I have heard the Queen-Mother say that he never gave her a moment's anxiety."

Macdonald said: "That makes things very awkward;" and then he added: "You must call the Queen-Mother Mrs. Spenlow——" He remained abstracted for a moment, then he asked:

"Isn't there an actress who goes about with him as I ordered? I am always seeing photographs of you and Mr. Spenlow and Miss Flossie Coward going about in a 200 h.p. Panhard; or are they all fakes?"

"Oh, they are genuine enough," the chauffeur answered. "But the King—I mean Mr. Spenlow, positively hates having to have her with him."

"Doesn't he want to be put back in his confounded little kingdom?" Macdonald asked.

"If you ask me," the chauffeur answered, "I believe he'd much rather play about with spanners and wrenches to the end of his day."

"Poor little devil!" Macdonald said. "He's got to go into the dark forest too."

"I don't understand Your Excellency," the chauffeur said.

"It's probable you wouldn't," Macdonald answered. "But I will explain it up to a point. And that point is that if anyone should cross-question you as to Mr. Spenlow's habits, you should represent him as being a thoroughly dissipated young man."

"But he isn't," the chauffeur expostulated. "I've never known anyone more respectable."

"I tell you," Macdonald answered, "that the only thing he takes an interest in is rushing about the country in a motor car with an actress at his side. You're always being fined for breaking the speed limit. You're going to have a nasty accident quite soon, owing to Mr. Spenlow forcing you to be reckless. Mr. Spenlow himself won't be quite sober at the time."

"I've never had what you can call an accident in my life," the chauffeur said sulkily, "and you're quite mistaken in thinking that that gentleman likes fast driving. As a matter of fact, he is a little cowardly, and what really interests him is the engines and the inside of the car. And as for not being sober . . ."

"My good chap," Macdonald said, "it will be your business in the next three or four days to get fined twice for exceeding the limit; and you will have to arrange for a nice little accident that will bring the names of Mr. Spenlow and Miss Flossie Coward and of myself and some other actress . . ." Macdonald paused suddenly, and then he asked:

"By-the-by, you haven't got an actress for me this evening? Someone quite disreputable?"

The chauffeur exclaimed: "Your Excellency!" in tones of panic.

"Don't you understand anything?" Macdonald asked. "Don't you understand that Mr. Spenlow and Miss Coward and myself are going to dine in public to-night? And that it is essential that I should take with me someone who is quite disreputable. Someone who will throw peaches at the head waiter and empty bottles of champagne over Mr. Spenlow?"

Mr. Salt's mouth dropped, his eyes took on an appalled glare.

"Can't you understand *anything*?" Macdonald asked. "Can't you see that I have to be the corrupter of Mr. Spenlow's youth and innocence? Can't you see how the papers have got to be filled with accounts of the desperate misdeeds of Mr. Spenlow and his companions? I tell you that I'm going to turn him into the most desperate ne'er-do-well that the history of kings can show. This poor young man hasn't had any kind of a record so far, but I'm going to give him a most desperate one."

The chauffeur suddenly clutched his fists, and his voice when he spoke was tremulous with emotion.

"Then all I can say is," he exclaimed, "that I'm not going to have anything to do with it. I'm the son of respectable Methodist parents, and I'm not going to see anyone, whether it's a commoner or a king, wilfully corrupted. It's disgraceful, it's disgusting; I can't stand it, and I won't. This young man, for all he is a king, is as nice and respectable a young man as anyone I ever saw. Give him a couple of spanners and a sparking plug and an old car and some standardised spare parts to play with, and he'll be as quiet and grave and good for the whole afternoon as if he were preparing for the ministry. And you want to take this young man—I tell you, I like him for his own sake . . . Of course, I know kings have got to be kings, but I won't . . . no, I'll be hanged if I will. . . ."

And suddenly Mr. Salt blew his nose.

"There, there," Macdonald said, "you need not cry about it. I really thought you would understand me better. But, of course, you haven't got a sense of humour. The steel you deal in doesn't run to that."

"I tell you, I'll throw up my job!" Mr. Salt exclaimed. "I will split on your whole show. . . ."

Macdonald, who was fitting the links into his dress shirt, exclaimed: "There, there!" soothingly once more. And when he had completed the fitting up of that garment, he looked up at the chauffeur with a friendly and rather childlike smile.

"It's all right," he said, "my good chap; don't let your feelings run away with you. The young man isn't really going to be corrupted. But it's absolutely necessary that he should appear as if he were."

"I don't see why——" Mr. Salt grumbled.

"Of course you don't," Macdonald answered. "But

I'll explain. Don't you understand the president and ministers of the Galizian Republic have got their eyes all the time on Mr. Spenlow? Now, exactly what we don't want is that they should hear that he's engrossed in tools and engineering."

"I don't see why not," the chauffeur said. "You couldn't have anything more respectable for a king to do."

"But they don't want a king, my dear chap," Macdonald said. "And for him to be taken up in that sort of work is just the sort of thing that will make them afraid that he's the sort of king to plan a counter-revolution."

"But he isn't planning a counter-revolution at all," the chauffeur objected.

"No! We, his devoted servants, are planning it for him," Macdonald continued. "And what the president and the ministers of the Galizian Republic want is that he should be a dissipated little scoundrel, with nothing in his head but wine and women and song and breaking the speed limit."

"I don't see why we should give the republicans what they want," Mr. Salt once more objected.

"We aren't going to, you know," Macdonald said. "We're only going to pretend to. All the dissipation will be only a put-up job."

A sudden light seemed to strike in upon Mr. Salt.

"I see, I see," he said eagerly. "You only want to hoodwink these republicans. You want to make them think Mr. Spenlow is an idle young fool in order to put them off the scent."

"It's extraordinary how intelligent you are, Mr. Salt," Macdonald said. "And you see, giving Mr. Spenlow this dashing reputation will serve a double purpose. It will not only put the Galizian Government off the scent, but it will make Mr. Spenlow popular with the Galizian people. Really, they kicked him off the throne because he was such

a milksop. That's what it really amounted to. You see, they're a nation of sportsmen. They like bull-fights and cock-fights and any sort of row. They'd like breaking speed limits if they had any kind of a road that a motor can run on. Only they haven't."

"They must be rather a nasty kind of a people," Mr. Salt said.

"That makes it all the more beautiful," Macdonald said.

"I don't understand," Mr. Salt answered.

"Why, it's as plain as the nose on your face," Macdonald exclaimed gaily. "You see, the Galizians are thoroughly sick of the republican government. They thought they were going to have some fun, but they find they're being governed by twelve people, each one as solemn and dull as a Methodist minister."

"I am the son of a Methodist minister myself," Mr. Salt said gloomily.

"Precisely," Macdonald encountered him. "So you know how dull it is to be governed by one of them. Think of your Sundays at home, and then think of being governed by twelve at once."

"Well, I give you the Sundays at home," Mr. Salt conceded.

"The point is," Macdonald said, "that it's all a matter of roads, really. The Galizians will take their king back with the actresses and motor car because of his dashing record! He won't really be dashing, but he'll start out to make roads. He'll pretend that the roads are meant for exceeding the speed limit on, and help them to get more quickly to the bull-fights and the cock-fights and the dagger-fights and all the other jolly rows. But all the time insidiously the roads will be spreading the . . . the blessings of civilisation. Why, in twenty years' time the whole Galizian nation will be a population of skilled

mechanics. I should not wonder," Macdonald concluded, "if they didn't ask you to become their prime minister."

"It sounds rather sensible," Mr. Salt said. "But you don't seriously mean to say that revolutions turn upon such little things as that?"

"Oh, come, come," Macdonald said, "you're much too experienced a man not to know what it is that wins the great heart of the people. The heart of another is a dark forest, it's true; but the heart of a people is a child's plaything. You can turn it right or left with any catchword. Why, if Mr. Spenlow could win the Derby, or kill a bull in the bull-ring, his descendants would be safe upon the throne of Galizia for the next thousand years!"

"Mr. Spenlow couldn't do either," the chauffeur said decidedly.

"Of course he couldn't," Macdonald answered. "So we have got to do the next best thing for him. Just be off now, while I dress, and tell Mr. Spenlow that I will be with him and Miss Coward at nine o'clock in the Long Room at the Ritz, and I'll do my best to bring a lady with me."

Mr. Salt, relapsing into the efficient chauffeur, said: "Yes, Your Excellency," and opened the door.

"Oh, and Salt," Macdonald added, "in the mean time, just think of a nice artistic accident that will make a maximum of smash with a minimum of danger to Mr. Spenlow and myself and two ladies."

Again Mr. Salt said: "Yes, Your Excellency, I'll do my best."

IV

IN the cellar-like room Macdonald set about dressing himself for dinner. But before he did so he took a look round the mews into which his door opened.

It was full of hansom cabs getting ready for night work, and it communicated with Regent Street by a narrow passage running under a tall shop. Upon the whole, the premises were exactly what Macdonald needed. He wished, upon the one hand, to present to the world the aspect of a needy and debauched adventurer who had got hold of a young and very wealthy exiled sovereign and was driving him very speedily to the dogs. On the other hand, he wished to be able to hold interviews with a large number of wealthy and influential people in such a manner as in no way to attract the suspicions of the Galizian Government.

The Resiliens Motor Cars Company, of which he had got himself named general manager, was a perfectly genuine affair, of which the largest shareholder was Mr. Edward U. Dexter, who had promised to find half the money for the Galizian counter-revolution. Mr. Dexter was an American financier whose home was in Vienna, where Sergius Mihailovitch had met him at a ball of the American Embassy. Mr. Dexter himself was rich, but not fabulously rich. He had made a good deal of money by cornering such little considered drugs as turmeric, which is a principal ingredient of curry powder, or such little considered articles as soda-water syphons. By the latter exploit—he had bought up the world supply for a year, and had raised the price of

each syphon by one-half a cent or one farthing or two centimes or three pfennigs, as the case might be—he had made just a quarter of a million sterling.

It was in this modest and unobtrusive way that Mr. Dexter made his bread. It was never his ambition to be the king of anything—neither a steel nor a pork king, nor yet even a tobacco king. But his secret ambition certainly was to marry his daughter to an English peer. He had, however, found English peers rather difficult to get hold of in Vienna or New York. Austrian and German nobles did not appeal to him. Though an American, he was sufficiently Anglo-Saxon to see that it is only the gold of British coronets that is really genuine twenty-four carat metal, though he was beginning to think that he might have to content himself with a French marquis. At the present moment, the corner in syphons having come to its end, Mr. Dexter had a good deal of loose capital in hand, and he had come to London to see whether it would not be possible to purchase for his daughter at least an English viscount. It was none of his money that he intended to put into Macdonald's scheme, but he was the European agent for at least two United States monarchs who had their eye on the copper that was to be found in the centre of the republic of Galizia, and if Mr. Dexter gave it as his opinion that this was a good gamble, the insignificant sum of eight million sterling would be found at once. He would be able to draw a cheque for it and be perfectly certain that the two American magnates would meet it when it came home. But as against this sum Macdonald had to raise a certain amount of money on his side in order to prove his bona fides. The actual amount did not very much matter. The present speculation was that Sergius Mihailovitch should raise eight million sterling against Mr. Dexter's forty million dollars. But Mr. Dexter was not going to be exacting in this matter. There was plenty of money

available, and Mr. Dexter was going to be quite contented with the actual sight of twelve and a half million dollars in the hands of Macdonald and the Queen-Mother.

Sergius Mihailovitch, however, didn't know that he hadn't got to raise the larger sum, and, whilst in his brilliantly lit cellar he got himself into his dress clothes, he laughed brilliantly to himself at the thought of that immoderate sum of money. It was like a colossal joke. By taking a good deal of trouble he might be able to raise £500 of his own, and he couldn't at that moment see where to go to put his hands upon another half-crown. He hadn't so far got any associates. He himself was almost the entire conspiracy, with the exception of a Galizian marquis called Da Pinta, who was grand chamberlain to the exiled king, and who had had all his Galizian estates confiscated at the revolution. The Queen-Mother allowed him £120 a year as a salary.

The Queen-Mother herself, formerly the Duchess Eulalia de Bourbon, was certainly not going to put a penny into the enterprise, and she was not going to allow her son to put a halfpenny. She was quite comfortable where she was, with a large town house in Lowndes Square and Breston Castle in Buckinghamshire, as well as £150,000 a year safely invested all in British consols. She had never known anything like such a feeling of peace and security in Galizia. And she was not going to sacrifice a penny of it in order to return to that dismal country. Macdonald and his plans she regarded with a benevolent neutrality. If Sergius Mihailovitch could put the king back on the throne, she would be remarkably pleased, for it would mean a certain increase of income, and even if they were forced once more to flee in an omnibus from the dirty little palace of Flores, the capital of Galizia, she would probably have contrived even before that time to have added something considerable to their capital. But the royal lady was

perfectly determined to retain intact No 72, Lowndes Square, Breston Castle, and the comfortable sum of money in consols. Besides, the Queen-Mother was a thorough Londoner. Until her marriage with the late king she had always lived with her father, the Duc de Bourbon, in Portman Square ; and for years after her accession to the throne of Galizia, she had not been able to sleep for want of the sound of the buses running down Baker Street. She didn't want anything better, really, than to go to mass every morning in the Jesuits' Church at Spanish Place, and to spend every afternoon in her drawing-room with three old French ladies and a couple of young English priests. So Macdonald, fastening his tie, laughed to think how he was setting out upon a high adventure.

It had begun three months before, when he had gone to Vienna to conduct the gipsy girl to the Grand Duke, who had been at that time in Moscow. Macdonald had spent two successive evenings in the Café Regentz because it had not been the season in Vienna, and he had not been able to find a soul that he knew in the city. On the first evening he had made the acquaintance of the Marquis da Pinta, who had sat at the table opposite him, feeling ill and solitary. The Marquis da Pinta had been sent to Vienna to take out of pawn a number of the Galizian crown jewels that the Queen-Mother had pledged as soon as the revolution seemed probable.

On the second evening Macdonald had got into conversation with Dexter, whom he knew slightly, and who was detained in that city by the winding-up of the affairs of his soda-water syphon corner. The Marquis da Pinta had put the idea of the counter-revolution into Macdonald's head, and Macdonald in turn had passed it on to Mr. Dexter.

Probably nothing would have come of it had Mr. Dexter not read in the *New York Herald* that a brilliant dinner had

been given in Nauheim by the Russian Grand Duke, upon whom he had remembered to have heard Macdonald say that he was an attendant. At this dinner the *Herald* had reported that there were present the Duke of Kintyre, Lord Bilsington, Viscount Kingston, the Hon. Cecil Buller, and Macdonald himself. Mr. Dexter had immediately made his wife and daughter pack their trunks, and by the next morning they were in Wiesbaden.

The Grand Duke had good-naturedly received Mr. Dexter with much cordiality because he passed as a friend of Macdonald's, and this had given Mr. Dexter great satisfaction. Moreover, Macdonald had been able to introduce him to Viscount Kingston and Mr. Buller. He had not been able to bring him in contact with either the Duke or Lord Bilsington, for at that time Sergius Mihailovitch had not known either of these gentlemen. The *Herald's* reporter had been mistaken in saying that Macdonald was present at the Grand Duke's dinner. At the last moment he had been detained because of an attack of nerves on the part of the Countess his wife.

Thus Sergius Mihailovitch laughed over his evening tie at the thought of his gallant little band of adventurers. There were exactly three of them by now—himself, the Marquis da Pinta, a little, miserable, yellow Galizian who suffered all the time from fits of malaria, and shivered perpetually until his teeth ached. And there was also by now Mr. Salt, the King's chauffeur. Those three were going to set a king on his throne, and at the thought it seemed to Sergius Mihailovitch that that was the happiest moment of his life. He wondered what other ragged companions he was going to pick up for this journey, and he was thoroughly glad that his bed that night was going to be some straw in the corner of the room. It added to the gay irresponsibility of the expedition.

It wanted twenty minutes of nine, and Macdonald put

on his coat and waistcoat, took a black cape from a nail, clapped open his opera-hat, and let himself out into the mews. The cabs had all driven off. In the dark passage leading to Regent Street he made out an expensively dressed woman standing doing something to her hair beneath her hat. As Macdonald passed her, her parasol, which had been leaning against the wall, slipped to the ground with a rattle that re-echoed in the dark vaulting of the passage. She made a quick instinctive movement to stop its fall, and so, at the same moment, her reticule of gilded links fell on to the pavement and a large coil of hair on to her shoulder. Macdonald recovered both the umbrella and the reticule, and held them out amiably towards her.

"Oh, do hold them for a minute!" she said in a childish voice. "I have been trying to do up my hair for the last five minutes, and those things are always falling down." She spoke German with a strong Viennese accent.

Macdonald remained balancing the things upon his hands for a full five minutes, whilst industriously she stuck hair-pins into her hair. She appeared to be young, ample, and with a certain bravura in her gestures and in the tilt of her large hat. And her hair was extraordinary in amount. If Macdonald suspected that its brilliance might be due to some such agent as that called Peroxide he couldn't doubt, on account of its obvious weight and vividness, that it was really attached to her person. She appeared to pay him no particular attention, and at last he said amiably:

"I've got to get, you know, to dinner some time to-night."

"You can always take a taxi," she answered pleasantly.

"You gentlemen are never really in a hurry. I could tell you were a gentleman from the way you sauntered along."

From her voice she appeared to be a mere child, and Macdonald answered jokingly:

"You ought to have said that you could tell I was a gentleman from the kind way I picked up your parasol."

"A waiter would have done that just as well," she answered; "that is what waiters are made for. I am always dropping my things, and waiters are always picking them up."

They walked together along the dark passage and into the glare of Regent Street. The girl was humming:

"Mein Herz das ist ein Bienenhaus . . ."

In Regent Street she said, "Gute Nacht," and turned, rather lingeringly, to walk along the pavement.

"Wait a minute," Macdonald said.

In the full glare of the London night her appearance was perfectly satisfactory. There could be no doubt as to her youth and little as to her irresponsibility.

"Do you think," Macdonald asked, "that you could throw a peach at a head waiter? You appear to know a great deal about waiters."

"I could throw anything at anybody," she said, "but I should not like to hurt a head waiter's feelings. My father was a head waiter in Vienna."

"Oh, of course it will be made worth the head waiter's while," Macdonald said.

"Then he will probably like it," she answered gravely.

"I am sure he'll like it," Macdonald corroborated; and he added, "And could you pour a glass of champagne over the head of a gentleman who will be at dinner?"

"I have never done it, but I have seen it done," she answered.

There couldn't, at that moment, be any doubt that she was a personage of extreme beauty. She was very fair, very large, and she had obviously any amount of spirit if she appeared to have no sense of humour.

"This is very fortunate," Macdonald said to himself. "I accept it as an omen."

"It isn't very difficult," she was continuing. . . .

"To accept it as an omen?" Macdonald asked.

"No! To pour a glass of champagne over a gentleman's head," she answered.

"Then you'd better," Macdonald continued, "come and have dinner with me at the Ritz with Miss Flossie Coward."

"At the Ritz!" she exclaimed; "and with Miss Flossie Coward! Oh, my God!"

And then Macdonald saw that her eyes positively filled with tears.

"No, I can't do it," she said. "I would have given my life to dine at the Ritz and to have spoken to Miss Flossie Coward. I have seen her face on a hundred thousand postcards, and she rides about in a motor car with a real king."

"Oh, well," Macdonald said, "you needn't bother if you aren't strictly respectable. No one is, you know; and you won't be asked any questions at the door."

Her lips quivered—large and red, they really quivered. "But I can't go home to-night," she said, "without taking £2. They will turn me into the streets if I don't."

"Hasn't it occurred to you," Macdonald asked, "that I might possibly give you £2?"

"No," she answered. "I don't think you would have thought of it. You are too respectful. Respectful gentlemen never think of giving one money."

"Well, there is something in that;" and he lifted his finger to stop a taxi-cab.

"Come along," he said, "get in;" and reluctantly she yielded to the temptation.

In the dark recesses of the cab, with its slight odour of petrol, she said with an accent of fear:

"But you haven't promised to give me anything."

"Oh, that's understood," Macdonald answered. "I'll tell you what I'll do. If you throw the peach at the head waiter I'll give you a five-pound note, and if you pour the

champagne over the King's head artistically I'll give you another five-pound note. And if the whole row is really brilliant, you shall have a third."

Suddenly she threw her arms round his neck and kissed him.

"Oh, my God! Oh, my God!" she exclaimed. "With three hundred marks I shall be able to get back to Hamburg again. Oh, I want to get back to Hamburg!"

Her kisses were fresh and agreeable, but Macdonald pushed her gently off him.

"My dear child," he said, "you really shouldn't disarrange one's hair. A man doesn't like having his hair disarranged before dinner, and as I've got to be a corrupter of kingly youth and innocence I had taken a great deal of trouble to make my hair smooth to-night. If you don't do it again I'll promise you this. Make this evening a real success of scandal, and I'll pack you off to Hamburg and give you a nice little sum to go on with when you get there."

"I'll scream like seven tigresses if you want it," she said; and then she added: "But if you're always so generous to me, perhaps I shan't want to go back to Hamburg at all."

"That is as it chances," Macdonald said. "I dare say I can find a use for you. But we *shall* be a queer crowd of adventurers," he added.

V

THE young King was playing spillikins with such industry and attention that he did not notice when Macdonald and the young lady were brought up to his table through the crowd of diners. In the brilliant diffused light of the great hall he sat bending forward over the large pile of wooden toothpicks that he had emptied on to the tablecloth—a rather dark, sulky-looking boy of eighteen, with no back to his head, a high nose, and an immense lower jaw. Miss Flossie Coward, a brunette with an oval face and small white teeth, which she showed all the time in a fixed and rather painful smile—Miss Coward had taught the King this game to keep him in a good temper whilst they waited for Macdonald. She had also lent him a hairpin, with which he was engaged in removing the toothpicks one from above the other. The King's head was bent very much on one side and his jaw hung down, his tongue following the motions of the point of his hairpin. Miss Coward thought he was the most thoroughly disagreeable boy she had ever come across, and he exceedingly disliked Miss Coward, for she had no conversation and could do nothing in the world but smile. From other tables they were being regarded by the Duchess of Richmond and Mr. Williams of Waterbury, Va.; by the president of the Royal Academy, who had with him the French Minister of Fine Arts and a party; and by the reporter of the *Daily Herald*, to whom Macdonald had contrived to have it conveyed that something piquant

was certain to happen in the Long Room that evening. Miss Coward said to the King :

" This must be Count Macdonald and his friend."

But the King only frowned and bent his head lower down over the toothpicks, and when the lady touched his shoulder he nudged her energetically with his elbow and grunted violently.

Macdonald sat down opposite this royal personage and placed his companion in face of Miss Coward. The King, looking up, said sharply to the head waiter :

" Don't you put anything on the table until I've finished my game."

The two young ladies began immediately to talk as if they had known each other all their lives. It appeared that Miss Elsa di Pradella had been an actress in Hamburg. There did not appear to be any light part that she had not played, though her age was seventeen. She had played soubrettes, principal boys ; she had danced in a *pas de quatre* ; she could even, she declared in broken English, do the splits. This Miss Coward found it difficult to believe, for Miss Coward had never done anything but skip about languidly in what is known as musical comedy. Miss di Pradella, however, explained how you were taught to do the splits. You stood upon two chairs, and they were gradually drawn apart . . . The King continued engrossed with his toothpicks. Behind him stood the head waiter bearing a tray. The shaded lights shone down, the conversation went up in a steady humming buzz from all the many tables. In the distance a soft band was playing somewhere, and, seeing that his three young people were all enjoying themselves, Macdonald permitted himself to slip into a reverie.

There were all these pleasant sights, there were all these pleasant sounds, the light was pleasanter than the light

of the sun itself; and Sergius Mihailovitch's idea of heaven was of a place where there was light, and always more light, diffused and warm. It was a scene of innumerable delicate contacts, of innumerable and delicate sympathies. He couldn't accuse himself of any longing for mere comfort. What he was after was more than anything a sort of asceticism—an asceticism of sheer efficiency. There were places where you could eat more and possibly eat better; there were places where you could find better wines, talk louder, lounge with more abandon, or unbutton to any extent. But that certainly was not what he was looking for.

He was forced to regard himself—if he was to regard himself as anything at all—as something of a crusader in life. After all, he was trying to key things up—to key up the whole world. He was setting out upon a desperate adventure. He was trying not so much to put back the hands of the clock as to retain for the world something that the world already possessed. It wasn't the mere setting up again in a ridiculous little republic of a ridiculous little monarchy; it was a question of proving to the world that certain things were good, and that there was enough to go round.

For himself, he knew perfectly well that it was a question of his own private predilections; but behind him he had Mr. Pett, who was the prophet of a democracy that would build itself up and not pull other persons down. Mr. Pett said that this was economically possible, and Sergius Mihailovitch was ready to take Mr. Pett on trust for the economic side of things.

Mr. Pett, as the basis of his political economy, held to the fact that this was the age of machines. All previous democratic theorists had taken, as it were, for the basis of their republics the figure of the single-hand worker. All states in the past were supposed to be run for the benefit

of some hypothetical man wielding some quite definite implement—a spade, a hoe, or the pickaxe. This individual was, as it were, the unit of coinage of all the former state currencies.

But Mr. Pett pointed out that, in the age in which we lived, such an individual could no longer be regarded as a proper unit. It was and it would remain a machine age. The man who still worked with an implement was either an incapable survival or a man so skilled above the common as to be an artist. To all intents and purposes the spade was as much an artist's tool nowadays as was the brush. You would no longer dig a field; nowhere, save in the most backward of agricultural communities, would you even use a horse-plough to a field. No, you used an immense machine that could turn over a hundred acres in the day. The spade, then, remained the tool of the most difficult feats of the gardener, or of the market gardener. But the cultivation of the earth in its broadness was given over to the skilled mechanic—to the man who could drive, tend, repair, and understand these immense machines. So it was with hoeing, with weaving, with mining, with the making of bricks, the baking of bread, the milking of cows. And the odd thing was, according to Mr. Pett, that though everyone knew that these things were so, there was no one who had yet taken into account how immensely these things had altered the aspect of the social problem.

It was as antiquated to legislate for the single sweated worker as it would be to estimate your naval expenditure upon the lines of the three-deckers of Nelson's date. No, what we had to do was to go in for a social policy that disregarded expenditure altogether, and disregarded altogether the vicissitudes of the individual. It wasn't any longer the statesman's business to take into account a picturesque and idealised blacksmith with his brawny arms, his sleeves rolled up, resting an immense hammer upon a

small anvil. The blacksmith had altogether disappeared by now. You couldn't tell with certainty where to go to find him lingering. What, then, was the use of considering him, even in your most Utopian dreams? It was like trying to make the ichthyosaurus happy. What you had to do, according to Mr. Pett, was to solidify the happiness of those who were already happy, and little by little to bring all the rest into line. As Sergius Mihailovitch and as Mr. Pett could remember, in their boyhoods the mere possession of a watch by a boy, even of the wealthiest classes, was sufficient to mark him off from, to let him appear amongst all his brother schoolboys, as an exception—as an aristocrat. Now there was no schoolboy who did not possess a watch. And that was the work of machines. And again and again Mr. Pett had returned to the charge. It wasn't our business to pull down, but to level up.

Macdonald himself was contentedly aware that his own views were less extended than this. What he saw was the pleasantnesses, and these he desired to maintain. He desired to maintain them simply because they were pleasant to him to contemplate, just as the paintings of Rembrandt were pleasant or the music of Delibes. It wasn't that he desired great possessions, but that it was comfortable to him to be in a world where great possessions existed here and there. It wasn't that he had any personal ambitions, but that he liked to think that greatness was a possibility. It wasn't that he desired the society of the fine, the noble or the cultivated, for of his own will he was setting out upon a long venture in the close society of an egregious American, an obvious prostitute, a disagreeable and foolish king, a foolish chauffeur, an unwashed Galizian, and a semi-imbecile actress. They were an odd band to stand for any ideal or for any high adventure. But Macdonald knew enough of the world, of history, and of the fate of kings and peoples to know that they were

about on a level with the figures of most idealistic movements. They were probably not a bit the better or a bit the worse than the supporters of Joan of Arc, of Robespierre, of Washington, of Garibaldi, of Napoleon III. or of Bismarck, just as they were not a bit worse than the supporters of Orsini the conspirator, or Cauchon who burnt the Maid of Orleans, of Benedict Arnold the traitor, of Walker the filibuster, or of all the innumerable spies, unknown traitors, or forgotten idealists whose one crime was their unsuccess. He didn't want more capable associates, he did not ask for larger resources, he considered that fate would undo him if he had all the battle-ships of an empire at his back. Fate could undo him by some little thing—by something as little as the malignancy of his wife or the breaking of a piston-rod. In the end, the only thing was the fineness of the adventure, the spirit in which the task was undertaken.

He was aware that Miss di Pradella, who had been laughing with Miss Coward, had risen from his side. She had leaned her parasol against the table; it had fallen to the ground, and true to her prophecy, a waiter had sprung to retrieve it. She was standing in the space between the tables, looking rather flower-like in her pink dress, and laughing without any self-consciousness at all, at Miss Coward. Sergius Mihailovitch had not the least idea of what was going on. Suddenly she lifted her skirts just above her ankles and slowly she subsided until she appeared to have sunk into the red velvet of the carpet.

There was a buzz of laughter, of applause, of reprehension. Miss di Pradella looked up at Miss Coward's face with an expression of laughter and of childish triumph. She was "doing the splits," victoriously and with a splendid unconsciousness of the place she was in.

Half a dozen men stood up in their places to look at her,

the head waiter had an uncertain air. One of her feet had pushed against the table-leg, utterly upsetting the King's pile of toothpicks. He swore with a sudden passion, and then, looking down at the smiling girl, exclaimed animatedly:

"I say! How perfectly ripping! How does she manage to do it?"

And immediately he became quite animated.

The head waiter gingerly assisted the girl to rise, and she came back laughing and smiling to Macdonald's side.

"I hope I have done you credit," she said.

"You couldn't have done anything better," Macdonald answered. "You're worth your weight in gold. I think I can let you off throwing the peach at the waiter and pouring the champagne over the King's head. You've been infinitely more artistic."

"Oh, but you'll give me the fifteen pounds?" Miss di Pradella said, with a sudden dismay.

"I should rather like her to pour the champagne over my head," the King exclaimed, "I should think it would be jolly ripping."

"Oh, you can all do exactly as you like," Macdonald said. "And you can all have as much money as you want. The evening is quite a success."

For Macdonald had observed that the reporter of the *Daily Herald* had snapshotted Miss di Pradella upon the ground and the King with his toothpicks.

But if it never came to throwing peaches, the King and the young lady were throwing pieces of bread at each other across the table, and even Miss Coward was so moved by the gaiety of the occasion that she imitated, in her best musical comedy manner, the crowing of a cock. This was her only accomplishment.

They finished up the evening in a box at the Empire, where there were already Mr. Edward U. Dexter and the

Marquis da Pinta. Macdonald was a little tired with his long journey, and the American annoyed him intensely. Moreover, Da Pinta, if he hadn't anything at all to say, annoyed him almost as much. The Galizian was too extravagantly dirty; and an old diplomatic uniform that he had put on because he was going to be in attendance upon the King was altogether too shabby to be bearable. It gave Da Pinta the air of being a forlornly dilapidated waiter at a German railway restaurant. It was, however, Mr. Dexter who was really trying. He was normally a loquacious man, but his first contact with a real king turned him into a positive geyser of moral conversation. He was a tall, fresh-coloured man, with silver-grey hair, and an exceedingly healthy complexion. He was, of course, an Anglo-maniac, and because he was going to be in attendance upon a king, he had put on a Windsor uniform. And because he desired to be as English as possible he had grown slight, grey side-whiskers, like those of a barrister. Thus, with his blue swallow-tailed coat, his white waistcoat, from which there depended an enormous fob chain with many seals, Mr. Dexter presented in a singular degree the aspect of a John Bull, so that Sergius Mihailovitch could not have said whether he resembled a music-hall singer or a walking advertisement for somebody's coaching tours. His voice had not so much the American accent as the American quality of highness, persistence, and monotony. It went on and on and on, and at every fifth word Mr. Dexter said : " Your Majesty."

Macdonald really needed to be quiet and, for the matter of that, he really wanted to look at the ballet. But all the while Mr. Dexter's voice droned. His theme was the high morality of the American trust system. It was, said Mr. Dexter, beneficent in every department in which it dealt. It seemed to render petroleum celestial and cheap ; beef a means of saving your soul, and inexpensive.

From pork the trust system seemed to have eradicated trichinosis, whilst bringing it within the range of the poorest pocket. And when it came to railways, in which for the moment Mr. Dexter was interested, there seemed to be no end to the glorious visions which in the United States they called up. To the remotest wildernesses Mr. Dexter's railways were going to carry not only ploughs but innumerable Bibles ; not only settlers but unity, concord, peace, fraternity, democracy, Christian love, flannel blankets, and the hot-air system of heating houses. Mr. Dexter positively spoke of broad plains, waving with golden wheat, where before the naked Indian had chased his prey. He spoke of churches springing up in the wilderness, and of psalms resounding where before only the icy wind could be heard screaming round granite rocks. And positively he spoke of teeming populations. And the ultimate vision that seemed to underlie all these images was that of Mr. Dexter with a seraphic countenance, the benefactor of this smiling region, ascending slowly to heaven whilst the bells rang from the steeples and the teeming populations upon their knees followed his apotheosis with tear-filled eyes.

"And it is these blessings I desire to be the means of spreading throughout Your Majesty's unhappy country," Mr. Dexter shouted in the young King's ear. His Majesty sat forward in the box, with the American behind him. There was a vacuous smile upon the King's face. He couldn't imagine what was happening to him ; he couldn't understand a word of the American's florid English. But from time to time he made faces at Miss di Pradella, who grinned ecstatically whenever he did so. She thought him a most agreeable child, for she had no idea at all of his kingly quality. And once the King put in her mouth, in full view of the audience, one of the chocolates with which Mr. Dexter had filled the box. And just as Mr. Dexter was beginning to turn his attention to the King's unhappy

country, Miss di Pradella made signs to His Majesty that she wanted to throw a chocolate into his mouth. The King let his huge underjaw fall open. Mr. Dexter paused for a moment ; the orchestra played its loudest ; upon the stage the full strength of the corps de ballet were marching round under scarlet, green, and mauve garlands, in the midst of blazes of purple, blue, and orange lights. The unfortunate Da Pinta groaned miserably, and held his dirty head in both his dirty hands. The English climate caused him to have an almost perpetual and quite unbearable toothache, and at that moment his pangs were worse than they had ever been. Miss Coward was smiling fixedly at the stage, her level teeth remaining visible all the time.

And then, Miss di Pradella's chocolate having fallen into the King's white waistcoat pocket, Mr. Dexter judged the moment opportune to repeat at the top of his voice :

"It is these blessings that I desire to be the means of spreading throughout Your Majesty's unhappy country."

Macdonald sprang violently up. He was shaking all over with exasperation.

"God damn you !" he really hissed. "Go and shout your confounded information in Trafalgar Square, if you want us all to be hanged."

Mr. Dexter looked appalled. "Really, your Excellency——" he was beginning with an aspect of anger.

"I tell you," Macdonald said, "that if you ever mention this affair again I will kick you neck and crop out of the whole thing, and you will never get a chance of speaking to a king again in your life."

A great deal of the complacency went out of Mr. Dexter's manner ; it was as if he were an inflated toy John Bull, and had been pricked with a small pin.

"I am open to admit that I have been imprudent," he said. "I hadn't realised the seriousness of it all. I apologise fully."

"Then don't do it again," Macdonald exclaimed. "I'll come and see you to-morrow morning and let you know if I can take you on again."

A really great rage possessed him. Mr. Dexter was panic-stricken; he was even a little pale, and there was no doubt about his contrition. But Macdonald hurried his own little contingent out of the box, and his rage was extraordinarily increased by the fact that Mr. Dexter, in his bright blue suit, and the Marquis da Pinta, in his shabby black with tarnished silver epaulettes and silver buttons, escorted them apologetically down the brilliant stairs and into the more brilliant light of the porch.

Macdonald took leave of no one, but, pushing his way through the illuminated crowd that blocked all those pavements of pleasure, he went solitarily away. He was hardly thinking, he was just cursing, and it was as if each footstep that he took was a separate stamp of rage. It appeared to him that he had been outraged, rendered ridiculous, and intolerably fatigued. He had crossed over the Circus, and was walking fast along the Quadrangle when he had a sense of a sort of pink companionship. And there indeed was Miss di Pradella, swinging along easily beside him. He stopped short and said irritably:

"What do you want?"

She had a little air of abashment and unhappiness. "I want my fifteen pounds," she said.

He felt nervously in his pockets. "I haven't got any money," he exclaimed. "Come to-morrow for it."

"But I must have it to-night," she answered.

Macdonald said: "Oh, hell! Can't you trust me?" And then he laughed. "No, of course, you can't trust anybody—I understand."

She did not contradict him, though she added, as a sort of instigation, "If I don't take money home to-night I shall be turned into the streets."

And then Macdonald regained his good temper. "Oh, well," he said, "you're probably worse off than I am. Come on, and you shall see how I live."

"But the money?" Miss di Pradella exclaimed.

"Oh, I have got thousands of pounds at home," Macdonald said. "And you shall have as much as you want if you're a good girl."

He felt as if he were telling fairy tales to a child. And, for the remainder of the short transit, he interested himself in her commonplace history, which she gave up to his questioning as if she were describing a railway journey, dispassionately.

She had been born in Vienna. She had joined a troupe of travelling actors. She had been a general utility girl at fifteen shillings a month with her keep. Then in Hamburg the company had failed; a girl-friend in London had written that she could find her excellently paid work.

"But I don't like the life," she said. "I have been here a fortnight, and I want to go back to Hamburg and be an actress again. When you have paid for your flat and everything here, it is too expensive."

"You want to go back to Hamburg?" Macdonald asked.

"Oh yes," she answered open-mindedly, "unless I could find something better to do here."

They were passing again under the narrow tunnel where they had first met. Macdonald stood still.

"Now supposing," he said, "I set you up in a flat and paid all your expenses?"

"I should like it very much," she said without enthusiasm. "Would you pay for my washing? I like washing. Lots and lots of linen."

"Oh, I pay for everything," Macdonald answered.

He was vaguely aware that a woman with a deep black veil was watching them from the end of the passage. Her figure in the shadow seemed dimly familiar to him.

"Of course I'd set you up respectably," he said, "and look after you. You could have proper dancing lessons. But come along. We can talk about that to-morrow."

They passed the dark figure in the dark shadow and turned to the right in the mews, that was lit by an old yellow gas lamp.

"It's very quiet here," Macdonald said ; and he unlocked his door and threw it open. "Come along in."

He switched on the brilliant lamp. And then suddenly he exclaimed : "By God ! that was my wife !"

And he ran back out of the door again as quickly as he could. But the dark figure was gone.

It wasn't to be seen on the broad pavements of Regent Street, though he followed for some minutes several solitary ladies in black. Then he gave it up and returned to Miss di Pradella.

In the brilliant illumination she was sitting on the table, where his shirt had been laid out. She was swinging her legs and, having taken out of her reticule a novelette of the cheapest kind, she was reading with engrossment. All round the walls hung Macdonald's garments on their nails. But to Macdonald's surprise, in place of his bed of straw there stood a shiny black and brass bedstead, the sheets and blankets being covered with an eiderdown quilt of an astounding, vermilion brightness. There was even a square of carpet on the floor. And upon the pillow was pinned a square of paper. Macdonald crossed to it, and before Miss di Pradella had come out of her romance he read the words :

"With the compliments of Mr. Edgar T. Salt, Chauffeur to H.M. the King of Galizia."

This was in copperplate ; but beneath it were pencilled the words :

"To show that I *am* some use. N.B.—There is a hot bottle in the bed."

Macdonald said : "Well, well, it's a queer world !"

Miss di Pradella looked up from her book. "I'll get you the money now," he said. And he drew out from a valise a leather case containing bank notes. He counted three into the girl's hand.

"I shan't give you twenty," he said, "because you'd probably only be extravagant, and there is no need for that if I'm going to look after you."

She slipped slowly down from the table and looked at him reproachfully and seriously.

"You had better give me another," she said, "because you're a married man."

"But what's the connection?" Macdonald asked.

"You had better give me all the twenty pounds," she repeated, "because I shall go back to Hamburg to-morrow. I've never come between a married man and his wife, and I never will."

"Well, it is an extraordinary old dark forest of a world," Macdonald said. "Who would have suspected that all these virtues and benevolences were hidden in its depths? We're an extraordinarily high-minded set of people, it seems to me."

"I don't understand you," Miss di Pradella said; "and this is a very funny place."

"There, there," Macdonald said comfortingly; "of course I seem too good to be true. But then so does Mr. Salt, and so do you."

"No, I'm not good," she said.

"Well, get along home, and pay your bills," he replied. "It's all right. You shall have your flat and your washing—oceans and oceans of washing! And you shan't come between anybody and anything."

"Is that true?" she asked.

"Oh, upon my word of honour," Macdonald answered. "Now get along."

And suddenly she once more threw her arms round his neck.

"Du bist herzensgut," she whispered in his ear.

"Oh, go away!" Macdonald said cheerfully. "But I am glad you've recognised that, all the same."

When Miss di Pradella had gone, he sat down and wrote to his wife that he wasn't carrying on a vulgar intrigue with the girl, but that it was part of the business in which he was engaged. Then he went out and posted the letter. He quite thought that his Countess would believe him.

In the brilliant light he lay gazing for a long time at the bright almanac on the bare wall. A spot of high colour, he thought that the lady it showed, with the green laurel wreath in her hair, stretching out her arms to an approaching automobile, resembled distantly Lady Aldington.

"Well!" he exclaimed, "you wouldn't say that this blazing place was a dark forest. But it is, all the same."

Then he turned out the light.

VI

IN spite of agitated letters of invitation from that gentleman, it was fully a week before Macdonald called upon Mr. Dexter. And it was a very tiresome week for him. He had to take the measure of the Galizian exiled court. And it took him a long time to realise that that court really hadn't any measure at all. The immense rambling house in Lowndes Square was exceedingly untidy, and Macdonald was given the run of it in a way that seemed to him to show a lack of any reasonable precaution. An English butler usually opened the door to him, and then there appeared to be an entire absence of any other servants. On his first visit Macdonald really was ushered by some sort of under-footman with a silver chain round his neck into the drawing-room, where there sat the Queen-Mother, three old French duchesses, and two young English priests. But after that first visit Macdonald seemed to be turned loose in the large house. No one knew where the King was. The Marquis da Pinta generally had the toothache so badly that he could give no information. If Macdonald went into the room immediately on the right of the entrance, he would find the rather gloomy dining-room untidy with the remains of meals generally upon the table. Behind this was a room that someone seemed to have begun to arrange as a bedroom. It contained at least an immense bedstead that was a real forest of twisted mahogany pillars. Whilst, on the floor, with their faces to the walls, were a number of pictures. On the left of the

hall there was a large room, the entire floor of which was covered with books, all deep in dust. This the Queen-Mother once mentioned as the library. Apparently it was the butler's business to see that Her Majesty had a dining-room in which, at irregular intervals, she had meals of some sort ; that she had the large drawing-room in which to sit with the three duchesses and the two priests ; and no doubt she had a bedroom. One of these days, apparently, they were going to give state dinners and begin the business of semi-royal entertaining. But, although they had been in England nearly ten months, Macdonald could not discover that they had done anything more than receive a number of callers. It might have been considered that the household was going through a period of protracted mourning, only Macdonald was quite sure that there wasn't any one in the house with sufficient energy to have given any such order.

On the Sunday—Macdonald having arrived in London on Saturday—there could not have been any talk of business. The Queen-Mother during Macdonald's formal call talked only of the sermon she had heard, of the English climate, and of the persecution that the religious orders were undergoing in France. And Macdonald spent the rest of the afternoon in arranging for the well-being of Miss di Pradella. On the Monday, when Macdonald came in from a protracted motor ride along the river by Kingston and back to the Surrey hills, in the course of which they were three times stopped for exceeding the speed limit, having dropped the two young ladies at their respective addresses, the King and Macdonald returned to Lowndes Square. They found the drawing-room in possession of an English princess and her husband, together with two or three other ladies. The royal personage told a good many entertaining stories of her experience in making tours in Canada, India, and the Straits Settlements. This was

quite agreeable, but it did not lead up to any business conversation. Macdonald spent the evening in taking poor Da Pinta to a new dentist, whom they knocked up in the midst of an evening party that he was giving. On Tuesday the Queen-Mother was in retreat in preparation for the feast of the Assumption of the Virgin. On Wednesday, being that feast itself, she was out the whole day paying a round of calls and dining at the Spanish Embassy. On Thursday the house was full of Brazilian notabilities, and just before dinner the Queen-Mother hurried off to take her share in the ceremony of perpetual adoration at the Brompton Oratory.

The King himself Macdonald had entirely at his own disposal. There was never any difficulty about finding him. If he wasn't at Mr. Salt's garage, Macdonald had only to telephone to his own office, and the King would be certain to be there or halfway between those two places. Upon the whole, Macdonald found him to improve upon acquaintance. He certainly hadn't any vices at all, just as he was entirely undeveloped. He reminded Macdonald fairly exactly of the boys of fourteen that he had known when he was at school at Harrow. And the extraordinary dullness which must have distinguished his upbringing hitherto was shown in the avid curiosity with which he explored any and every kind of machine. But, indeed, he appeared to know absolutely nothing at all, so that it astonished him beyond measure when, having run out of petrol, near Reigate, Macdonald suggested to the King that he should go into a local garage and purchase a can; for the King positively did not know how you bought things over the counter. But, on the other hand, he was quite pleased to acquire knowledge, and he displayed almost as much curiosity as to the workings of the British Constitution and the elements of political economy as he had done with regard to the inside contents of the new bonnet of the

latest car supplied by the Resiliens Company. Probably this was because all these things had about them something mechanical. And once he had discovered that money would buy things, he asked quite timidly to be allowed to purchase a cheap American clock, in order to pull it into pieces. This he did on the homeward road, and he was quite as happy as he was when he was pinching Miss di Pradella's arm to make her scream.

For his part he was entirely ready to agree to any of Macdonald's schemes for a future government of the kingdom of Galizia. He agreed to anything with all the more readiness since he took not the least interest in the matter. But since the Queen-Mother must obviously remain as Regent for several years to come, the King's acquiescence was of no value to Macdonald. It was on the Friday morning that Macdonald really took Da Pinta to task. The new dentist having much relieved his pain, that nobleman, who now suffered only from malaria, was able to take a comparatively intelligent interest in the counter-revolution. And Macdonald was able to get him to see that it was absolutely indispensable that he should have a business interview with the Queen-Mother.

The Queen-Mother had the strongest possible objection. The festivities of the week being at an end, the normal calm had descended on the royal house, and that afternoon Her Majesty was seated in her drawing-room with only two of the French duchesses. But she had three priests.

She had represented to Da Pinta that she could not possibly leave her guests to have a private interview with anybody. But the Marquis was able to counter that objection by suggesting that, as the drawing-room was eighty feet deep, there was nothing to prevent Her Majesty's withdrawing with Macdonald into one of the windows, where they would be entirely out of earshot of the tea-party, which the King might honour with his presence.

Thus, at last, Macdonald found himself face to face with the royal lady, whose countenance showed every sign of bad temper.

"Your Excellency," she said, "I know nothing at all about these matters. I have told you already many times that I leave them entirely to yourself and to the excellent Da Pinta."

Macdonald, who was upon perfectly familiar ground as soon as it came to persuading dilatory royal persons to take important steps, immediately lost himself in a flood of apologies. It was abominable of himself, he said, so to inconvenience Her Majesty, but nothing but the extreme urgency of the moment and the necessity of having the benefit of Her Majesty's wisdom, experience, and advice would have emboldened him to withdraw Her Majesty from her charming circle of amiable guests. . . .

With her head slightly upon one side, the Queen listened whilst Macdonald expatiated on the subject of her own merits and sagacity. Her pendulous, whitish features with the heavy eyes, the white eyebrows, and the deep folds in the cheeks relaxed little by little beneath the well-trained flattery of this amiable and charming young man. At last, with a motherly and condescending gesture of the hand, she exclaimed :

"Well, well, what is it you want me to do ? "

Her Majesty seemed always to be dressed in rather shabby and rather untidy black. But, as if in revenge, her broad bosom appeared to be defended by an armour of diamonds set in silver, and her gouty white fingers were covered with rings with large jewels. And there was about the heavy lines of her face such a potentiality of ill humour that she might very well be classed as royal. It was as if, though she could not trouble you in anything material—as if, though she could no longer order you to execution or confine you in oubliettes, she could nevertheless extraordinarily

worry you by one or two words of scorn, supposing, of course, that the opinion of her circle mattered at all to yourself. And, indeed, she was really not at all a disagreeable woman, though she loved money, ease, and deference.

Sergius Mihailovitch drew from his breast pocket a long document upon parchment.

"I am certainly not going to read anything," the Queen said.

"It is only necessary," Macdonald answered pleasantly, "that Your Majesty should sign and seal it. Of course Your Majesty may be signing and sealing away your entire fortune. But it is not for me to object to that."

Sleepily the Queen-Mother beckoned towards her Da Pinta, who was watching them anxiously from the tea-table. And Da Pinta came towards them, his whole untidy personality stiffened and his shoulders shrugging up to his ears.

"What does this document contain?" the Queen-Mother asked. "You have read it?"

Da Pinta bowed very deeply and very stiffly. "Excellent Majesty," he exclaimed, "it contains the new constitution of the kingdom of Galizia. The provisions of this constitution . . ."

"Pass the constitution," the Queen-Mother said. "Only I warn you that if I find that in practice it works out as anything disrespectful to myself, I shall make my son abdicate at once."

"Excellent Majesty," Da Pinta protested, "is it to be imagined that I, who have sanctioned this constitution in your name, should allow to pass anything that in practice could appear to be disrespectful to Your Majesty?"

"I do not think you would," the Queen-Mother said. "What else is in the document?"

"That, Your Majesty," Da Pinta said, "confers upon this gentleman, the Count Sergius Mihailovitch Macdonald,

one of the aides-de-camp of His Imperial Majesty of Russia and a Commander of the First Class of the Order of Alexander II”

The Queen-Mother looked at Sergius Mihailovitch with a sleepy interest.

“So you have got the Order of Alexander II?” she said. “That is very respectable. Of course I confer upon you anything that you desire.”

“But Your Majesty had better hear,” Da Pinta said. And he pulled out from his pocket a very old and shabby spectacle case, from which he took out a pair of glasses. He began to read short-sightedly.

“Your Majesty confers upon Count Macdonald and myself the supreme command of all forces, whether by land or sea, whether ecclesiastical or financial, of the Galizian counter-revolution.”

“I do not know about the financial control,” the Queen said.

“It means,” the Marquis said, “only the control of paying out money. Your Excellent Majesty may, of course, at any time pay anything that Your Majesty wishes.”

“I certainly wish to pay nothing,” the Queen-Mother exclaimed. “Not a single penny! Pass all powers that I confer on you, too.—Da Pinta, you look extraordinarily comic in your spectacles.”

Da Pinta said: “For the rest of the document I should like His Majesty to hear what it is.”

The King had come in and was holding over his hands, as he stood beside the distant tea-table, a skein of wool that the Duchesse de Creil, a very old woman, was winding into a ball.

“His Majesty,” Da Pinta said, “has already studied and sanctioned the constitution, but it is well that he should hear of the concessions of Crown lands that have to be made.”

"Well, go and fetch him," the Queen said.

Da Pinta appeared to be becoming more and more business-like. He no longer drooped so much, his moustache appeared to grow spiky; his beard stuck out more bravely. And it was with positive briskness that he walked down the long room towards the King.

"That poor, faithful Da Pinta," the Queen said to Macdonald; "do you see how he is becoming alive at the thought of regaining his confiscated land?"

Still brisk, Da Pinta returned, clicking his heels as he walked, and behind the young King slouched along with his hands deep in his pockets.

"These are the concessions," Da Pinta said; and he began once more to read.

"Your Majesties confer upon the Count Macdonald and myself all such portion of the Crown lands in the province of Galegas as shall be found to contain any minerals or any oil of the kind known as petroleum. These minerals and this oil shall be worked by such persons as the Count Macdonald and myself shall agree to. One-tenth of the gross profits of such mines and oil wells shall be the royalty to be paid by such persons to the Galizian Crown. During the first ten years of these workings one-half of these royalties shall be diverted to the repayment of the adventurers in the scheme of putting Your Majesties again upon the throne. But this repayment shall not continue for more than ten years from the day upon which Your Majesties shall be proclaimed, whether or no the amount repaid shall exceed or fall short of the sums advanced by the adventurers. Count Macdonald and the Marquis da Pinta in no case to receive any more than the sums personally advanced by them."

The Queen-Mother said: "Wait;" and then she appeared to reflect for several moments.

"No, I do not understand it," she said at last. "I do

not understand what profit Count Macdonald will make out of this enterprise."

"Oh, there will be plenty of profit for me," Macdonald said. "Your Majesty need not worry about that."

"It is precisely about that I do worry," the Queen said.

"I do not like people to make profits that I cannot see, because they may be very big ones. And if there are very big profits, I think it is the right of the royal house to share them."

Macdonald laughed: "Then let it be put in the bond," he said, "that the royal house shall have six-sevenths of all the profits that I make out of this adventure."

"I think that is very proper," the Queen-Mother said. "Da Pinta, see that that is added to this document."

Da Pinta looked first at the Queen-Mother and then at Sergius Mihailovitch.

"This appears to me to be nonsense," he grumbled. "It is expressly stipulated that Count Macdonald is to make no profits, and six-sevenths of nothing is nothing."

The Queen-Mother waved her fat, begemmed hand towards the ground in a gesture of command.

"Put it in the document," she said, "we are well satisfied with the rest of it. It is an excellent constitution that will be beneficent alike to the people and the sovereign."

"But Your Majesty has not read the document," Da Pinta muttered.

"My excellent Da Pinta," the Queen said, "you are very stupid. If we are satisfied that the contents of a document are satisfactory, then . . ." Her Majesty wavered for a moment because she had nothing whatever in her head. "Then," she continued with a new start, "we are satisfied." And she looked almost triumphantly out of her sleepy eyes at Da Pinta. "Besides," she ejaculated, "you yourself, my excellent Da Pinta, have assured me that this constitution will be excellent for our people."

Am I to understand, then, that you withdraw? Or, perhaps, have you too not read this document?"

"Excellent Majesty," Da Pinta stuttered, "I took it down with my own hand from the dictation of Count Macdonald and of a Señor Pett."

"Then you are acquainted with it?" the Queen asked.

"How could I be otherwise?" Da Pinta asked in return.

"And you think it will be excellent for the people of His Majesty the King and myself?"

"It will be admirable," Da Pinta said.

"Then what more could you desire?" the Queen asked triumphantly. "I think it would be admirable, and you agree with me. My dear Da Pinta, I do not understand why you make all these objections. Is it because it is stipulated in the bond that you will make no profits? My faithful friend, can you not rely upon the well-known generosity of our house? Besides, your estates will be returned to you."

The excellent Da Pinta, who enjoyed an income of £120 a year by the generosity of Her Majesty, set his heels together and, with a stiff bow, said that if he could not rely upon Her Majesty's generosity no one in the world could.

"Then," the Queen said triumphantly, "I still more do not understand why you have made all these objections to our sanctioning this project. Can it be, my faithful friend, that you have become avaricious in your old age? That I do not wish to believe. And yet you object to there being inserted in this bond a clause giving to the royal house a small share of the undoubtedly immense profits that Count Macdonald will make out of this enterprise. What, then, am I to believe? Da Pinta! Almost you force me to imagine that you expect secretly to receive from Count Macdonald that share of the profits—six-sevenths, and surely that is little enough—you desire to divert into

your own pockets that share which should fall to the royal house. My dear Da Pinta, this saddens me very much ; for if I cannot trust you, whom can I trust ? ”

Fire glowed in Da Pinta's dark brown eyes. He stamped his feet.

“ But this is imbecile ! ” he exclaimed. “ Madam, there will be no profits, so it would be the act of a madman to put in a clause about profits. ”

“ Da Pinta, you forget yourself, ” the Queen said. “ Your sufferings have made you mad, so we pardon you. ”

Da Pinta rolled his eyes despairingly upon Macdonald.

“ Your Excellency, ” he exclaimed passionately, “ will you decide whether it is I that am mad or this silly old woman ? ”

The Queen had folded her arms, and was complacently tapping her left elbow with the fat fingers of her right hand.

“ Poor Da Pinta ! ” she exclaimed. “ Assuredly we shall have to have you put into a strait-jacket. . . . But I say that assuredly I will not put my name to this document unless the clause about the profits is added. ”

“ And I say, ” Da Pinta exclaimed, “ that I will never add it. ”

With a face of deep seriousness Macdonald turned to the Queen.

“ I will add it myself, ” he said. “ It is obvious that Your Majesty is entirely in the right. Certainly six-sevenths of my profits shall go to the royal house. ”

The Queen directed a glance of triumph to Da Pinta. But that nobleman once more burst out :

“ But if there are no profits, how can there at the same time be six-sevenths of the profits ? ”

“ My dear chap, ” Macdonald said to him in English, but speaking so fast that the Queen did not well understand him, “ if there were no madness in this sort of adventure there would be no adventure. ”

"What's that? What's that?" the Queen exclaimed. "I do not like this whispering."

"Your Majesty," Macdonald said, "I could not very well ask the Marquis to mend his manners at the top of my voice."

At this point the King, who had been trying all the while to catch a large blue-bottle that noisily evaded his fingers on the window-pane—the King turned round and uttered the words:

"I say, look here!"

But the Queen went on: "I ask Your Excellency, though you as an interested party cannot be expected to return an impartial answer . . ."

Again the King exclaimed: "I say, look here!"

But the Queen continued: "I do not expect you to return an impartial answer. All the same, I ask you, could any one's attitude—any royal person's attitude—have been more correct than mine has been all through this interview? For I have two duties: one towards the people of Galizia, and the other towards the royal house." And the Queen looked with heavy eyes at all the three who stood before her. "In the course of these tiresome negotiations," she continued, "I have in the first place safeguarded the interests of a beloved people, and in the second I have insisted on securing the interests of the royal house against adventurers. . . ."

And then suddenly the young King burst out in English:

"I say, look here! This is all bally rot. I won't have that beastly clause put into the silly document. I won't have Macdonald insulted, and that's an end of it. He's a friend of mine, and if either of you insult him you insult me. But I'll put a clause in to say that Macdonald shall be made a Duke because he is the best friend I have. And Miss di Pradella shall be a Marchioness because she is a jolly girl, and Da Pinta shall have the Golden Fleece, and

I'll do my best to get both Macdonald and Da Pinta the Garter. So that's an end of it. . . . Put all that I have said into the bond, Da Pinta, and let us have no more talking. For I think it's our sheer duty to say that if Macdonald, who is a gentleman, refuses to make any profit, it's our duty not to want any share of the profits. If I'm going to be a king, I am going to be a king, and I can't have anybody—not even Count Macdonald—being . . . What's that silly phrase you used at Kingston, Mac? . . . Oh yes, I can't have anybody being *plus royale que le roi*. Put it all in, Da Pinta, as I have said. And then, for God's sake, get the signing and sealing over. I can't stop here all day. I've got more important things to do than this nonsense."

And the King turned once more to the large blue-bottle and the window-pane. Outside, his new car was shining in the sun, and he made a gesture to Mr. Salt, who, in his mackintosh, was looking up at the house.

"Now that was a very silly speech," the Queen-Mother said. "Who wants anybody to be *plus royale que le roi*? You would almost think that my son suspected me of being selfish. But that, of course, is unthinkable. . . . Well, what do we do next?"

A sudden jab of toothache went through Da Pinta's head, and he groaned lamentably.

"Yes, what the devil do we do next?" he cried.

"Oh, give Her Majesty the pen, and light a little candle for the sealing-wax," Macdonald exclaimed patiently. "There is really nothing to be done except to sign and to seal. After all, all the other things can be put into some other document."

"Of course, of course," the Queen said. "How foolish you have been, Da Pinta, to impede us with all these objections! Of course, we must put all the rest into another document. I think your sufferings have made you mad."

"But this is only what we all wanted from the beginning," Da Pinta grumbled.

"Of course it is," the Queen said. "Now be silent! Where is there a pen?"

Between two of the windows there was a little table that had upon it many silver objects. To this Da Pinta rather sulkily proceeded. He lit a little candle that sent a golden glow on to the facets of crystal ink-pots and on to the roughened surfaces of chiselled silver seal-holders, so that all the table resembled a small altar.

"Your Majesty signs first," he said to the King. "And Your Excellent Majesty second; then I sign as witness, and seal as Great Chancellor of the Kingdom; then Count Macdonald"

"Hallo! Where is it?" the King said. He came from the window, and, his tongue rolling round his lips, he signed his name. "Now I can go."

"No, Your Majesty must wait to affix the seal," Da Pinta said.

"Oh, cut it short!" the King grumbled.

Da Pinta set the sealing-wax in the little candle and, drop by drop, let the wax, like drops of blood, fall on to the parchment. He worked the wax round and round.

"And this is history!" Macdonald uttered pleasantly to himself.

The long room was getting a little dark. In the background one of the duchesses by the tea-table had gone to sleep, the old Duchesse de Creil was knitting fast. Two of the priests were talking together; the third had curious eyes fixed on the royal group by the window. The King sealed, the Queen signed, a great, fat, stupid-looking woman with pendulous cheeks of a papery white. At the second seal Da Pinta burnt his fingers, and he began to suck them and to stamp his feet. But there was at least the semblance of a decorous silence.

"And in the end," Macdonald exclaimed, "no doubt all historic scenes at the heart of them were much like this. Napoleon I was tortured by internal cramps when he gave up his sword on the *Bellerophon*. Napoleon III read one of the stupidest novels in the English language all through the night before his abdication. Without doubt, Cæsar was chiefly concerned in keeping his feet dry when he crossed the Rubicon ; and no doubt Alexander, when he sighed for new worlds to conquer, was only hungry. . ."

"Now I suppose," the Queen exclaimed, "you will allow me to finish my tea in peace. I consider that I have been much too good-humoured." And going towards the tea-table she held up one of her fat hands for Macdonald to kiss. He did so with one knee bent, and, graciously, she sailed on towards the two duchesses and the three priests. The King had already run out of the room, and they heard from outside the long buzz of the immensely powerful engine. It gave three great crashes, and then they heard its noise fade into distance. Macdonald went near the table and bent over Da Pinta, who was signing his name with elaborate flourishes and great care.

"Where does the romance of all this come in?" he asked gaily.

"Romance?" Da Pinta grumbled. "That detestable woman will make me spit out all my teeth one of these days! I tell you she is unbearable."

Macdonald sat himself slowly down at the little table and picked up a quill.

"And loyalty?" he asked, "and patriotism? Where do they come in?"

"Loyalty! Patriotism! I am sure I don't know," Da Pinta exclaimed dismally. "It is all just a *blague*. It would be better to be a peasant of the Gallegos district, lying in the sun with his bit of goat's cheese and his

wine-skin, and his plough ox breathing down the back of his neck. They have no troubles. . . ."

"Oh, come," Macdonald said, "that's a very commonplace unphilosophic way of looking at it. Remember that you are the saviour of your country, and that your name will be inscribed in letters of gold upon the Galizian roll of glory."

Da Pinta only spat as if he had in his mouth little fragments of tobacco from the end of a cigar.

"You talk like a child of ten."

"That's because my heart is pure," Macdonald laughed. Then he signed his name.

PART III

I

IT was in other ways a very busy time for Sergius Mihailovitch, for, having taken stock of his position, as it were between two breaths, it had occurred to him that, for his daily bread, he might just as well rely on the fact that he was chief manager of the Resiliens Motor Car Company. He was quite aware that all that was expected of him was his name on the prospectus of the company, and he was quite aware that his name was not worth the 800 guineas that he was at liberty to draw from the company.

He hadn't at first had the least idea of drawing it, but on Monday, after signing Galizian bonds, there had been a meeting of the board of the company. He hadn't indeed intended even to attend this board meeting, but there was a Mr. Lawson, who was not only sub-manager, but also the secretary of the company. Mr. Lawson had previously occupied a post with a British firm. He had quarrelled with the manager of the firm, and having been for eighteen months, as he called it, "out of a shop," he had been forced to accept a position with this American affair. This had been a sad blow to his patriotism, for Mr. Lawson, whilst he had been in his former position, had spent much time in telling customers that all these American machines were made of meat tins, joined together with hairpins. He had spent so much time at it, and had worked himself up into such enthusiasms of patriotism, that he felt himself singularly subdued now that it was his duty to his

employers exactly to give his former self the lie. He had been used to say :

"Don't buy one of these cheap and nasty American affairs. You'll find yourself sitting in the road one day, with bits of scrap-iron all round you, if you do."

Now he had to say :

"What's the good of bolstering up these lazy British firms? You pay twice as much for one of their cars as for one of ours, and the same quality. And why? Because they are over-capitalised and wastefully managed. You aren't paying for a better, but only putting a premium on bad management. Why! only look at the finish of our bodies!"

So that as yet the words did not come very glibly from Mr. Lawson's tongue. He had only been at the job a fortnight, and the mere organising of the offices and getting the show-rooms in order had taken nearly all the time.

Sergius Mihailovitch had seen him quite often; he had spoken to him twice. For Mr. Lawson was always to be seen running about with a sheaf of papers in one hand and a foot-rule in the other—a rather small man, with a stiffish brown moustache and worried brown eyes.

Once he had come to Macdonald and asked him if he would mind having the receiver of the private telephone from the works at Willesden set up in the passage beside Macdonald's bedroom. And once again he had come to Macdonald in the office to ask whether he might bring his papers into Macdonald's room, and explained that his own office on the other side of the show-room was too dark to write in, and one of the fuses of the electric light had blown out. He had to draw an advertisement for all the weekly papers, and the boy was waiting for the copy.

Macdonald said: "Oh, come in;" and the small depressed man set down on Macdonald's desk his quill pen, his camel's-hair brushes, and his little pot of sepia

ink. With extreme industry he had begun ruling black lines upon a square of paper. He had gummed on a little half-tone reproduction of a motor car. Beneath it he had begun to write with shiny sepia :

“THE RESILIENS! EASY, ECONOMICAL RESILIENT. YOU WANT ONE!”

He looked at Macdonald, who stood over him. His face had a little depressed and weary air.

“That’s not much good as an ad.; but what can we do?”

“It looks very pretty to me,” said Macdonald. “What more do you want?”

“Oh, you want startling facts for an advertisement,” Mr. Lawson answered. “But what are we to do? For there isn’t even a single member of the aristocracy who has bought one of the things. There is no one on this side of the water to look after this sort of job. I am not the man for this, even if I had the time. It’s heart-breaking, how these Yankees manage things! I don’t know why they wanted to set up in England at all. There is no one for me to apply to for instruction. The board is nothing but old women. As for Mr. Dexter, he can’t tell the difference between a wired tyre and the hot-box of a railway engine.”

His whole manner expressed so much dejection that Macdonald felt forced to say kindly :

“Oh, come, cheer up! Ought not I to provide you with startling facts?”

Mr. Lawson said “You” in a tone that was an odd mixture of contempt for Sergius Mihailovitch the idler, and of admiration for him as an aristocrat.

“Well,” Macdonald said, “I am supposed to be the general manager. What have I got these expensively furnished rooms for?”

“Oh, you’re too much of a swell,” Mr. Lawson said.

"Your title is only on the prospectus to rope in small investors. You aren't supposed to do any of the practical work."

"That seems rather hard on the small investors," Macdonald said. "I suppose they expect me to do something for my money."

"It's rather hard on them," he got his answer. "But that's the way it's done."

"It's the way it oughtn't to be done," Macdonald said.

"Well, you can't alter it," Mr. Lawson said gloomily; and he rang the bell and told the commissionaire to send in the boy who had come for the copy from the advertisement agents.

"Wait a minute," Macdonald said. "Tell the boy to wait. Let's have a little talk about this."

He stood reflecting for a moment, and then he sat down at the large desk opposite Mr. Lawson.

"None of this seems to me to be right at all," he said. "Here am I, who am not expected to do anything at all, and I have this large, fine room."

The walls of Macdonald's office were panelled in the American fashion with dark green tulip wood. Upon the right side of the room stood a Chippendale bureau. Upon the panelling itself there hung facsimile reproductions of Rembrandt's "Knight in Armour," Romney's "Lady Hamilton," Gainsborough's "Blue Boy," and Van Dyck's "Charles I" with the large white charger. All these pictures were in heavy gold frames. There were in the room three deep leather armchairs, and against the walls a dozen Chippendale dining-chairs with seats of red leather. The table in the centre was long enough to seat sixteen people, and it was of black bog oak.

Mr. Lawson also looked round upon this gentleman's dining-room.

"Yes," he said, "that's the Yankee way of doing

business. I've seen their offices in Chicago—just like this. And no business doing except getting the money out of small investors. It's all swank, and a decent man like me oughtn't to be set to work at a job like this. They don't *mean* to do any business here."

"Oh, well," Macdonald said, "you might just as well say that a decent man like me oughtn't to be in a job like this."

"I'll say it if you like," Mr. Lawson echoed him.

Again Macdonald reflected. "The car is a good car, isn't it?" he asked. "In fact, I know it is."

"Oh, it's a ripping good car," Mr. Lawson corroborated, "and dirt cheap at the money, whichever quality you buy. The mere standardisation of the parts would make it an absolute boon to anybody who can only afford one car. Why, if you live in a place like Ashford and your differential goes wrong, all you have to do is to wire up to us, and you'll get a temporary spare part by the next passenger train. Any other firm in the country would take a fortnight putting your car straight, and all the time you'd have to be without its services."

"Well, then," Macdonald said cheerfully, "if the car is all right, all we've got to do in the interests of the small shareholders is to put the other things right."

"You can't do it," Mr. Lawson repeated. But his tone was slightly less despondent, and he added: "Of course *you* could do something. But it would not be worth your while to try."

"Ah, well, let's see," Macdonald said. "Let's review the whole situation. It may not be worth my while, but it's extraordinarily interesting. Besides, there are the small investors to consider. Are there many of them?"

"A great many," Mr. Lawson said. "The people who have got this thing in hand have an extraordinary faculty of getting money from poor people. You'd have thought

it couldn't be done with motors nowadays, but they have done it. Nearly all the money in the show comes from quite poor people, who can't afford to lose a penny. If you like to put it that way, the amount of energy they have put into extracting money from the poorer public is exactly the counterpart of what they want on the side of selling what they ought to sell. We shan't sell anything at all. How can we? There is only me and two chaps to haul the cars about in the show-room, and a couple of chauffeurs to take customers for rides. And there's nobody else at all, except the typewriter."

"Well, we'll see about that," Macdonald said. "Of course, I am extraordinarily innocent. I ought to have seen that an oily Pharisee like Mr. Edward U. Dexter wasn't the sort of person to do anything but swindle quite poor investors. He couldn't be trying to sell an honest article. He talks too much about being an instrument for the benefit of humanity. . . . But now, supposing we look at the advertisement. I am not an expert, but I'll just consider myself a member of the public to whom we appeal. Supposing you put, in little italics, under your large black letters . . . ? But here, let me . . ."

And Macdonald took the sheet of paper from Mr. Lawson. He wrote beneath the words: "*You want one,*" in small copper-plate letters the additional words:

"We have only been selling in this country one fortnight, but already H.M. the King of Galizia has run one of our cars three thousand miles without a hint of engine or tyre trouble, while H.M. has been summoned three times for exceeding the speed limit. These facts talk!"

Mr. Lawson surveyed this announcement with a critical eye.

"It's better, of course," he said; "but—it's open to objections. It looks as if we favoured unlawfulness."

"Well, we do—don't we?" Macdonald asked.

"Of course we do," Mr. Lawson conceded; "but we mustn't say so."

"Oh, you're too extraordinarily English," Macdonald laughed. "We can issue another advertisement next week to say how shocked we are that the King should ever have done such a thing. That will put us right. Because, of course, we are shocked."

Mr. Lawson looked at Macdonald with misgiving.

"But how will H.M. like it?" he said.

"Oh, I'll take the responsibility of that," Macdonald answered. "And while we're about it, just do this." He took once more the advertisement, and made two little round blots of ink, one beyond each end of the reproductions of the motor car. Under one he wrote:

"By special appointment to H.M. the King of Galizia."

"Oughtn't we to say the ex-King?" Mr. Lawson asked.

"Oh, I'll take the responsibility of that, too," Macdonald said. And he wrote beneath the other blot:

"By special appointment to H.I.M. the Grand Duke Nicholas Alexandrovitch of Russia . . ."

"I have the right to confer that appointment myself," he added. "Of course, it will cost a couple of hundred pounds. But I suppose somebody will pay it."

"But we can't put that in until the expenditure is sanctioned by the board," Mr. Lawson objected.

"Oh, nonsense!" Macdonald said. "I'll pay it myself if anybody makes any objection."

"Oh, but that's impossible," Mr. Lawson said. "I can't really sanction that. You could never run a company on those lines. It has never been done."

"My dear chap," Macdonald said, "what's the objection? If my conscience calls on me to spend £200 on the company for the good of the widows and orphans that the company is trying to swindle . . . what's the objection?"

"But it's not business-like," Mr. Lawson objected.

"Such a thing has never been heard of. As the secretary to the company, it's my duty to protest."

"It's going to be done now," Macdonald said with an amiable firmness. "Just you get that advertisement, as I have drafted it, off to the agents at once. I suppose they can get engraved blocks of the arms of Galizia and of the Grand Duke?"

"I suppose they can," Mr. Lawson said; "but it all seems to me to be very immoral. There is something queer about it all. It's not thoroughly scrupulous."

"You mean it's too scrupulous," Macdonald said. "That's why it disturbs your English conscience. But I have got to do something to justify my having these fine rooms, whilst you have only got a sort of a dog kennel on the other side of the show-room, and you do all the work."

"Oh, that's all right," Mr. Lawson said, "because I am only an employee, and you're a nobleman."

"Only a foreign one," Macdonald said.

"Oh, you behave exactly as if you were an English peer," Mr. Lawson sighed as he began once more to redraft his advertisement.

"Now, I thought I behaved a little better than that," Macdonald laughed.

"I don't know," Mr. Lawson said, "it's all so queer."

Nevertheless, ten minutes later Macdonald heard him telling the advertisement agent's young man in tones of the most business-like ferocity that there would be hell to pay if the agents did not get out blocks with the arms of Galizia and the Grand Duke in time for sixteen weekly papers and eleven dailies on Thursday.

And on Thursday itself, happening to see Sergius Mihailovitch going out of the show-room, he said rather timidly:

"Isn't your Excellency going to attend the board meeting? It's going on now."

And Macdonald found that the board meeting was going on in his own room. Upon the black oak table eight blotting pads and eight shining pewter inkstands had been arranged, and round the table itself sat seven elderly gentlemen. One of them said to Mr. Lawson :

"Now, Mr. Secretary, it's quite time we got begun." And he looked at his watch.

But Mr. Dexter, looking more English than ever in a suit of pepper-and-salt tweed, cut away into long tails so that it resembled a gamekeeper's suit—Mr. Dexter threw the whole assembly into confusion by exclaiming :

"God bless my soul ! Let me introduce Count Macdonald to you all." And Macdonald made the acquaintance of Major-General Alhusen, an elderly gentleman with mutton-chop whiskers ; of Sir Archibald Cull, a very old gentleman with a white beard ; of the Hon. Mr. Samuel Isaacstein, a middle-aged gentleman with mutton-chop whiskers and double chin ; of two gentlemen whose names he could not catch ; and of another gentleman whose real name was Bryant, but who was always addressed as Mr. Roy because he represented the firm of Roy, Roy, and Pringle, the solicitors to the company.

They all engaged in a great deal of desultory conversation, and Mr. Dexter talked a great deal of what the American railway system might do for the benighted country of Russia—the conversation having turned upon that kingdom because of Sergius Mihailovitch's origin. All the time Mr. Lawson sat at the top left-hand corner of the table, silent and depressed, looking down at the papers spread on the table before him. Suddenly Mr. Isaacstein pulled out a fat gold watch.

"Really, Mr. Secretary," he exclaimed, "it's time you read the minutes of the last meeting. Time is money, you know."

The son of a British peer, Mr. Isaacstein spoke the

English language with a strong German accent. He had indeed been born and educated at Frankfurt on the Main.

They all took their places round the board of black oak, and, turning their faces towards Mr. Lawson, they began to play with quill pens in the inkstands before them. Then Sir Archibald Cull, who sat at the head of the table, said :

"Gentlemen, the business before the meeting——"

But one of the unidentified gentlemen interrupted :

"Surely we've forgotten the minutes of the last meeting?"

And Sir Archibald, without appearing disturbed, said :

"Mr. Secretary, will you read the minutes of the last meeting?"

Mr. Lawson began to read out : "The Resiliens Motor Car Company of Great Britain and Ireland, Limited, Board Meeting at the company's offices on September 1st. Present, Sir Archibald Cull, Major-General Alhusen . . ."

A decorous silence reigned ; they might have been in church, all these gentlemen so pink-fleshed, so white whiskered, and Sergius Mihailovitch felt descend upon him a deep calm, an unrivalled satisfaction. He was in the midst of a really British manifestation. Here was the solidity, the orderly routine, the practical knowledge of how to conduct public or commercial affairs.

He was sitting between Major-General Alhusen and Mr. Isaacstein. The secretary continued reading the minutes. Suddenly the Major-General said in a low voice :

"It's going to rain. I've got a twinge of gout in my right big toe."

Sir Archibald said from the end of the table : "It can't be going to rain, the glass is going up."

"It's going to rain," the General repeated obstinately. "My great toe is better than your glass."

"I made the glass myself," Sir Archibald said.

"Well, it was God made my toe," the General said. "I guess He's better at making things than you."

All the while the secretary's voice continued in a restful undertone. Mr. Dexter turned his head to one of the unidentified gentlemen beside him. He began to talk. Sergius Mihailovitch caught the words :

" . . . Added three and three-quarter million acres of wheat to the world's supply of wheatland."

Mr. Isaacstein said huskily, " You should take Flox for the gout, General. I always takes Flox mineself——"

The General paid no attention to him. He shouted at Sir Archibald :

" I'll bet you two to one in monkeys that it rains before twenty-four hours are over."

Mr. Lawson passed a sheet of paper to Sir Archibald, who exclaimed : " You know I never bet," whilst he signed his name without reading the paper.

Mr. Lawson passed the paper to the Major-General, who signed it whilst he was listening to one of the unknown gentlemen opposite. The unknown gentleman opposite was suggesting that Alhusen should take out a weather policy at Lloyds. Alhusen pushed the paper on to Macdonald. . . .

" But what am I to do with it ? " Macdonald asked him.

" Do with it ? " the General exclaimed, as if he were trying to talk courteously to an idiot. " Sign it, of course ! "

" But I don't know what it is," Macdonald said.

" Oh, sign it, sign it ! " the General said. Then he called to the gentleman across the table :

" Lloyds won't insure against a certainty, and when my toe aches——"

" Gentlemen," Sir Archibald exclaimed from the top of the table, " the business before the meeting is the raising of a further capital sum of"

Mr. Lawson took down his words rapidly. No one else paid him any attention.

Mr. Isaacstein pulled the paper out of Macdonald's hand. "You don't sign it," he said. "You weren't present at the last meeting." He signed himself and threw the paper across the table. He winked largely at Macdonald and chuckled.

Everybody was talking at once about a by-election in Worcestershire. One of the unnamed gentleman had got hold of the new prospectus of the company which had been drafted by Messrs. Roy & Roy. He wanted to know what was meant by the term "good will" in that document, and he made some light pencil markings. Sir Archibald exclaimed that "good will" meant the stock, buildings, and fixtures. Mr. Lawson explained that it did not mean the stock, buildings, and fixtures. The gentleman who was known as Mr. Roy, but whose real name was Mr. Bryant, quietly took the document from the unnamed gentleman and rubbed out the pencil marks with a piece of india-rubber.

Sir Archibald exclaimed: "Gentlemen, the proposal to raise new capital is carried unanimously. As there is no other business before the meeting this meeting is now adjourned . . ."

The unidentified gentleman said that Sir Archibald ought to have used the words "at an end" instead of "adjourned." But every one was on their feet. Mr. Isaacstein clapped Macdonald on the shoulder.

"That's how it's done, me boy!" he exclaimed. He winked once more and, pulling out his fat watch, he hurried away.

Sir Archibald and the General took their high hats from Macdonald's bureau. Each of the high hats had a deep mourning-band. They each said: "Good day, gentlemen," and walked out side by side. The two unidentified gentlemen took their high hats from off the red seats of Chippendale chairs against the wall. Each of their high

hats had a mourning band not quite so deep. They each said: "Good day, gentlemen," and left the room. Mr. Roy, whose real name was Bryant, gathered all his papers into a black bag and took his bowler hat from the table before him. He left the room without saying "Good day," for his mind was already deeply occupied with a case that he had to attend immediately at the Law Courts. Mr. Lawson was gathering up his own papers and the blotting paper of all the other gentlemen. He appeared to be very tired, and was grumbling to himself.

Macdonald approached Mr. Dexter, who was standing in a British attitude before the fireplace, his two hands upon his hinder thighs. He smiled benevolently at Macdonald.

"A good day's work," he said. "Shall we go and have lunch, and talk over our own little affairs?"

"I'm afraid I can't lunch with you," Macdonald said. "I've kept the King of Galizia waiting for us all this time. But just tell me one thing . . . Shall I be expected to sign the minutes of the next meeting?"

"Of course you will," Mr. Dexter said, with a British breeziness. "Of course; of course we all shall."

"I didn't understand a single word," Macdonald said.

"Of course not, of course not," Mr. Dexter answered. "We none of us did. But it's all right."

"You mean," Macdonald asked, "that the money will come out of the pockets of the small investors just as well, whether we understand it or not?"

"And when are we really to discuss our own little affair?" Mr. Dexter evaded Macdonald's question.

"I don't know," Macdonald said. "I am very busy. I've got the concession from the King and the Queen-Mother properly signed and sealed. But I can't say when I shall have time to talk it over. I'm not much in the humour at this moment."

"Oh, come!" Mr. Dexter exclaimed. "Come, come!"

Mr. Lawson, who had gathered up all his blotting paper, approached Macdonald noiselessly.

"I should much like," he said, "to have a word with Your Excellency before Your Excellency leaves the room. It's not a matter connected with the company, but I believe it's rather urgent."

Mr. Dexter began to tiptoe towards the door. "I'll go and speak a word or two to His Majesty," he said, "whilst you're having your private interview."

He was almost out of the door in his eagerness. But Macdonald called out to him:

"It won't be any use, you know, your trying to get concessions out of the King behind my back. The King is still a minor."

Mr. Dexter stood still as if he had been struck a hard blow in the chest.

"Oh, it's all right," Macdonald said. "I know you aren't trying to go behind my back. I know your eagerness is really due only to your desire to lick the dust off a king's boots."

Mr. Dexter's lips moved inarticulately.

"There, there!" Macdonald exclaimed; "that is only my nasty humour. If you would like it, I shall have the greatest pleasure in taking you and your daughter for a run with the King and myself and the ladies. We can lunch somewhere by the river. It will be very pleasant."

A high smile irradiated Mr. Dexter's cheeks.

"That will be delightful!" he said; and he hastened through the door, leaving a sort of glow of gratitude behind him.

"How you *do* treat Mr. Dexter!" Mr. Lawson said. "What a polished irony you have! I try to think of things to say like that, but they never come into my head."

Macdonald was stamping his feet and swearing violently. His eyes blazed, and all his hair became ruffled.

"It's the most damnable business," he said. "Oh, it's damnable!"

"There, there!" Mr. Lawson tried to soothe him. "The meeting was quite regular. There wasn't anything out of order. I can understand what you feel at the thought of the small investors. I always feel it myself when I am reporting these meetings. I always have to have a good glass of port afterwards. I'm going to have one now. Shall I fetch you one?"

"Yes, do!" Macdonald said. "What's that?"

They heard the sound of Mr. Dexter's voice raised very high.

"Mamie," it exclaimed, "get into your smartest motor-coat and take a taxi here as quick as hell! You're going to lunch with the King."

"It's Mr. Dexter talking through the telephone," Mr. Lawson said.

Macdonald exclaimed: "Oh, damnation! Oh, damnation!" And he made hurriedly, round the table, towards the door; but Mr. Lawson stood gently in front of him.

"I wouldn't go out just yet," he said. "Not till you've had your glass of port and feel better."

Macdonald ran his hand down his forehead. "Perhaps you're right," he said. "But just go out—do me the favour to go out and ask the ladies in the King's car if they'd mind going to lunch at the Savoy alone. Tell them that the King and I have got business together. You understand? Get them out of the car before Miss Dexter can get here. Let them have the new sixteen h.p., and Darr to drive them for the afternoon."

Mr. Lawson looked rather stupidly at Macdonald.

"Don't you understand?" Macdonald asked. "I

can't have Miss Dexter driving about in public with those women. I thought even Mr. Dexter would shy at the invitation. But he's such a damned snob that he hasn't. And I'm in a hole ! ”

Mr. Lawson hurried from the room. And Macdonald remained walking up and down agitatedly, and exclaiming to himself :

“ I'm no good for this sort of thing,” he said. “ I oughtn't to have to do with fools. What's the matter with me ? I'm no good. I'm as bad as a woman ! What would it matter to me if that odious American swindler's silly little daughter did come in contact with the other two ? It wouldn't matter a curse.”

But he continued to walk up and down, tall, thin, and fair, with his hair in disorder.

“ Decidedly,” he said, “ there's a soft spot in me. You'd say there was a screw loose too. It's not my business to keep the world in order. . . . ”

Mr. Lawson came quietly back with a large tumblerful of dark liquid in his hand.

“ There, drink that,” he said, “ there is nothing like it. You'll feel better at once. It's from the cellar of my grandfather, who was the Bishop of Richmond.”

Macdonald drank off the whole glass at a draught.

“ Oh, you oughtn't to have done that,” Mr. Lawson said reproachfully. “ You'll have missed all the flavour, and I have only got three dozen left.”

“ Oh, my poor dear chap ! ” Macdonald said.

“ Oh, it's all right ! ” Lawson answered “ Perhaps you'll join me in a bottle when your nerves are more at leisure. But it's all, all right. The ladies are quite ready to go to the Savoy, and Darr has got the sixteen h.p. out already. There, you can hear the engines. . . . ”

Macdonald sighed with relief.

“ But aren't those ladies quite respectable ? ” Mr.

Lawson asked, with an innocent wonder in his brown eyes. "They're dressed like young duchesses."

"Respectable as your grandmother!" Macdonald grumbled.

"Oh, but my grandmother was *quite* respectable," Mr. Lawson said, with an innocent and amazed protest. "She was the wife of the bishop."

And then Macdonald burst into a fit of laughter.

"Oh, well," he said at last, "those young ladies are perfectly respectable. But it's their profession to be suspected of immorality. They're like inverted bishop's wives. They've got to live on their reputations. But, of course, I didn't mean anything against your grandmother. It was a silly schoolboy phrase that I learnt at Harrow."

"Oh, that's all right," Mr. Lawson said. "But it's very interesting to hear your theory about living on reputations, and I'm awfully glad you're feeling better, because . . ."

"Because what?" Macdonald asked.

Mr. Lawson stuttered rather nervously. "Now, don't get upset again," he said, "because it's a thing that might happen to all of us. It *has* happened to all of us. And, of course, if those ladies aren't quite respectable it explains it all. At first I thought it was debt . . ."

"But what the deuce is it?" Macdonald asked.

"Now, don't get angry!" Mr. Lawson said. "But there's a man . . ."

"A man!" Macdonald repeated.

"Yes, waiting! There is a man waiting in Little Walden Street. And there's another waiting outside your door in the mews. They're waiting for you. At least, they've been asking Darr and the commissionaire questions about you. And they have each of them separately given Darr and the commissionaire a sovereign to hold their tongues."

Again Sergius Mihailovitch relieved the little man's feeling by bursting into laughter.

"Then they aren't bailiffs," Mr. Lawson said. "Only detectives? I thought they were bailiffs."

"Oh, you'll find this neighbourhood buzzing with detectives," Macdonald said. "It's all right, it's exactly what I want. I should have been extremely disappointed if they hadn't turned up."

"But what are Darr and the commissioner to say to them?" Mr. Lawson asked. "They both came to me and told me at once, and they said they would say anything in the world you wanted, because you're a real gentleman!"

"What a lot of kindness of heart there is in the world!" Macdonald said. "It's perfectly astonishing! Let them just say the exact disreputable truth. The more disreputable they make it the better it will suit me. I'm an idle, dissipated, bankrupt adventurer, you understand."

"But we all know," Mr. Lawson said, with an accent of hero-worship, "that you're one of the best families in Europe."

"My dear chap," Macdonald said, "I'm only telling you what to tell the detectives."

"But," Mr. Lawson said, "are they to tell both detectives the same thing? For they're employed by two different firms. The commissioner, who knows a thing or two, says that one comes from Nash's in Conduit Street, and the other from May's of Baker Street."

"Oh, I think he must be mistaken," Macdonald said, "for there's only one Government that would want to watch me. My own Government *might*. But they always employ detectives of their own—most drunken Russians."

"Well," Mr. Lawson said, "the commissioner was positive that there were two from two separate firms."

"Then I suppose they want to be extra sure," Macdonald said gaily.

He took his motor cap and spectacles from a drawer in the bureau and ran through the show-room. Miss Dexter was sitting in the car beside the King. Her father was beaming opposite her. As Macdonald got in beside Mr. Dexter he perceived a fat and florid man, with large boots and an egregious umbrella, hiding behind the taxi-cab that had brought Miss Dexter. And when they drove off he perceived this individual speak hurriedly to the driver of the taxi and bolt into the cab. It followed them.

"Now, this will cost the Galizian Government a pretty penny for cab fares," Macdonald said gaily.

II

IT was upon the whole a pleasant run ; but because they had started so late they could not get, even with the smartest driving of Mr. Salt, any further than Richmond. They lunched, therefore, in a little hotel overlooking the Terrace and the wide view of the Thames that, through a fine, Indian summer haze, showed here and there only like large loops and sickles of pale silver. It was quite a pleasant little domestic occasion, and it was rendered the more pleasant because, every time that Mr. Dexter began to talk about the higher morality of trusts, his daughter said, in a little grating invalid's voice :

"Do shut down, Popper. You make my poor head ache."

So that all they really had to talk about was the view, the history of Richmond, the real Cheshire cheese and the roast fowls, and the manners and customs of old-fashioned English hotels. The occasion struck Miss Dexter as real quaint just as the waiter who waited on them had real cunning old whiskers. This Miss Dexter was a little, pale, quite old-fashioned American girl. There was nothing whatever about her that was smart ; even her smile was the smile of an invalid, and her brown eyes had in their irises the shadow of what she called her headaches. And, indeed, her headaches were the strongest characteristic of her frail being. So that when she said to her father that

he must shut down Mr. Dexter became silent with an air of consideration that seemed to be the only thing about him that did not lack dignity. And when she said to Macdonald :

“ Mr. Count, you’ve got a real lovely voice ; it’s just grateful to my poor ears,” Macdonald could not but feel extremely pleased.

And even the King behaved like a good boy. For one thing, he was interested in the resilience of some new puncture-preventing liquid that Mr. Salt had put into the tyre. For another, he was quite interested in the history of England as Macdonald related it, in its connection with the landscape beneath their eyes. The poor boy had never heard either any history or any fairy tales, and Macdonald really contrived to let him see historical figures, like the princes and princesses of fairy tales, walking about amongst the falling leaves of the broad Terrace with the very still view, in the breathless air, the whitish haze and the mellow sunlight of the late autumn afternoon. And he really liked Macdonald, so that when Miss Dexter, on their rising from the table, said :

“ I guess I’ve got to thank you, Mr. Count, for the vurry *happiest* lunch of my whole life,” the King brought out, with an English schoolboy’s blundering enthusiasm :

“ Oh, he’s a thundering good fellow, is old Mac, a right down thundering good fellow ! ” For, actually, the only person who had been really kind to him since the death of his father the late King had been an English groom in the stables of the Palace at Flores. So that his English as well as his manners might very well have been those of any young English duke who had passed the greater part of his time in his father’s stable. The poor young King had really loved Jenkins the groom. He had learnt of him ethics, morals and a rough-and-ready stable honesty. And this affection he had transferred to Sergius Mihailovitch ;

for Mr. Salt was too filled with the enigmatic coldness of the skilled mechanic to be loved, however immensely you might admire him.

The young people went down into the car, but Mr. Dexter stayed behind to try to pay his share of the bill. Whilst Macdonald was gathering up the loose silver from amongst the pieces of bread on the tablecloth, the American began :

"Now, couldn't Your Excellency take the opportunity of five minutes' discussion of our little plan ? "

"My dear chap," Sergius Mihailovitch said, "I've told you before, this thing is much too dangerous to be discussed in public places. . . . There is a chap—a florid, fat chap, whom you will see sitting in the bar below as we pass. And that man is a detective. He has followed us from Little Walden Street, and he'll follow us back. If we ever do discuss this thing, it'll be in a time and place selected by myself."

Mr. Dexter had become vastly more eager over "their little affair" during the course of that morning's ride. His own motives were so inextricably mixed that he couldn't in the least have unravelled them himself. For one thing, he really imagined that he was anxious to spread the blessings of American civilisation into a benighted kingdom. For another, he really wanted to put his American correspondents, the two United States monarchs, into a soft thing ; and he really considered that the oil-bearing regions of the Gallegos district of that benighted kingdom were exceedingly valuable, so that he would gain immediate prestige and position in the syndicate that included the two millionaires, himself, and one of the United States secretaries of State—he would gain that prestige if, at a cheap rate, he could obtain the concession of those oil-bearing lands. He was also much impressed by the negligence which Macdonald showed towards the King ; he was

still more impressed by the affection that the King had shown to Sergius Mihailovitch. He had some faint idea that whilst they were standing there his daughter might be making inroads into the affection of the King himself. And he felt more than anything an intense desire to keep friendly with Macdonald, since that morning for the first time in several years he had seen his Mamie show a little colour in her cheeks and a little light in her eyes. To do that again, to have it done for him continually, Mr. Dexter, with his high colour, his side whiskers and his pepper-and-salt suit—Mr. Dexter would have sacrificed all the other motives of this life, for he loved his daughter with an intense and dog-like passion. So that he really turned pale when he repeated, appalledly, Macdonald's words.

"If we ever discuss the thing . . . what do you mean by that? Isn't it settled that we do?"

"I don't know," Macdonald said. "To be perfectly candid, I disliked your business methods of this morning immensely. I don't know that I should be justified in imposing such a system as yours may be upon any country that I'm interested in. To tell you the exact truth, I think your whole methods are without any heart at all, and I don't know just exactly what safeguards I can devise against you. I'm thinking the matter out, and when I feel settled in my mind I'll make an appointment with you."

"But, good God!" Mr. Dexter ejaculated.

"I really can't talk about it," Sergius Mihailovitch cut him short.

"But my methods—" Mr. Dexter said. "Do you mean to impugn my honesty?"

"My dear chap," Macdonald said, "I shouldn't mean to impugn the honesty of the Redskins who scalped your ancestors, whoever they were. I shouldn't mean to impugn the honesty of Judas Iscariot; but there are methods I like and methods I dislike. I'm a crank, you know."

"But if you want safeguards——" Mr. Dexter stammered . . . "I'm not used to being called Judas Iscariot. . . . But I'll let you have any safeguards you want. I should have thought I had explained sufficiently to you how beneficently the system of combines really acts. But I'll let you have all the safeguards, as you call it, that you want."

"I certainly expect you to do so," Macdonald said. "But the point is, that I want to think out what those safeguards are to be. I can't conceal from myself that the whole of history has been a fight between your sort of men and my sort of men. And I want to make myself, and anybody who depends on me, as safe as I can before I go into partnership with you." And then Macdonald smiled amiably. "You see, I don't want to be rude to you, but it's the lamb going into partnership with the tiger, when all is said and done."

"Upon my word, Your Excellency!" Mr. Dexter said, and he recovered some of his lost breeziness, "that really is a most fanciful simile!"

"All similes are, you know," Macdonald said; "the point is, how far they come near expressing the necessary truth. . . ."

They found the King lying underneath the body of the automobile in the road. Miss Dexter was holding his cap, his goggles, his pocket handkerchief, two spanners, and a little oil-can. She was even smiling faintly.

"I guess I was never an oiler and cleaner before," she said:

Mr. Salt, who had been paying his own bill, came out from the hotel door. They all got into the car. And immediately afterwards, with an aspect of hurry, the fat and florid man ran down the steps and bolted into his taxi-cab. When he was comfortably following them into Richmond Park gates, he was unfortunately turned back

by the keeper because hired vehicles are not permitted to use those roads.

And on their way back it suddenly occurred to Macdonald to say :

“ By Jove, I’ll take you to call on my wife at Putney ! ”

It had occurred to him that, not having received any answer from the Countess, it was his duty to go and see, at least, how she was.

Countess Macdonald herself opened for them the door of a small villa standing well on the road towards Wimbledon Common. She had been washing her hair, and was drying it in the sun of the back garden, so that she had a towel with a red border over her shoulders, and her hair itself was loosely dripping down her back. In her left hand she held a brush and comb.

“ We’ve just looked in to see how you are,” Macdonald said pleasantly. They were all of them on the door-step, for it had taken some time to get the door opened. He added :

“ This is Miss Dexter, this is the King of Galizia, this is Mr. Dexter.”

The Countess surveyed Mr. Dexter with indifference, the King with a glance of contempt. To Miss Dexter she gave a look of keen scrutiny, which died down at once into indifference. Then she looked at Macdonald with what he knew was intended to be a meaning glance, though what it meant he could not exactly tell, for he imagined that she ought to be feeling particularly friendly towards him. He stretched out his hand in her direction, and she put her own behind her back.

“ Don’t touch me,” she said. “ I don’t want to be polluted.”

No one except Macdonald really understood this speech, and he continued to smile friendly. She was standing

full in the doorway, an erect figure in a sulphur-coloured garment that they all took to be a dressing-gown. But suddenly she withdrew into the passage.

"You can all come in if you want to," she said. "But I don't know what you expect to get in this house."

It was Mr. Dexter who came to the rescue rather astonishingly.

"Well, I guess we want a cup of tea," he said; and without a word the Countess marched right down the passage in front of them. They came out in a back garden which, though it was narrow, was extremely long. Between two apple-trees a hammock was slung, and beside it was a cane chair. The Countess marched straight to the hammock and sat down in it, swinging her legs. She pointed to the cane chair.

"You can sit there," she said to Miss Dexter. "If you want tea, Sergius Mihailovitch can get it for you. My servant is out."

Mr. Dexter suddenly fell upon the King like a refreshed lion :

"If Your Majesty will just walk apart with me to be out of earshot of my daughter's headache," he said, "I'll explain to you what I was saying about the overhead trolley system. I guess the ladies will not wish to hear it."

And he walked off the poor young man down the long path beneath the apple-trees. Macdonald lingered for a moment beside the hammock. He had some vague idea of trying to discover how he had managed to displease his wife, and he was very much afraid that the Countess would insult Miss Dexter. And suddenly Miss Dexter broke out :

"Oh, Countess, I think it's perfectly quaint and cunning how you live here! And I just love your husband. I think he's the loveliest man I ever met."

The Countess swallowed in her throat and looked down at her hair brush.

"He's just the kindest, most thoughtful, most attentive man I've ever met," Miss Mamie continued, "and I think it must be just heaven for you to live with him!"

And suddenly the Countess looked kindly at Miss Dexter. "My dear child," she said, "you must be very young."

"I'm just nineteen," Miss Dexter replied. "I was born in Buffalo, New York. And I've lived all my life in Vienna, where you don't see much of gentlemen. But I hope I'll see a great deal of you, and that you'll teach me to be less ignorant."

Macdonald walked quietly away over the grass and into the kitchen. He lit the gas-stove, boiled the kettle, found the tea, the cups and saucers, the sugar basin, and the tray. He had some difficulty in finding the milk, which was in a can outside the kitchen window, where it had been placed by the milkman. When he reached the garden again, carrying the tray, he found beneath the apple-trees Lady Aldington and the Duke of Kintyre. The Duke was bending over Miss Dexter, and Lady Aldington seemed to be talking intimately to the Countess Macdonald. But they all ceased their conversation upon the appearance of Macdonald.

Kintyre and Lady Aldington explained that they had run down to call on the Countess. Mr. Dexter was still walking the King up and down the path at the end of the garden. . . .

III

IT wasn't, however, for nearly a week that Macdonald could bring himself to have his business interview with Mr. Dexter, and this was as much as anything because of the bewildering muddle in which he felt himself to stand. He could not really get at any main point of his immediate career. All he knew was that an extraordinary number of people seemed to want him to do an extraordinary number of things. Thus, Miss Dexter insisted that he should go shopping with her. She did not appear to know a single lady in England. Lady Aldington sent him a card for an At Home. On the top of the card there was written : " Dr. Farquhar will speak on the nationalisation of Scottish railways. You remember Dr. Farquhar ? "

Miss di Pradella also insisted on being taken to Hampton Court. He couldn't make out why she should want to be taken to Hampton Court. She didn't appear to know anything about the place. She wouldn't let either the King or Miss Coward accompany them, and she insisted on dropping Sergius Mihailovitch at an inn called the Rainbow, whilst she herself was driven to another public house called the Swan. When she came back she exhibited every sign of distress. It appeared that there had been at the Swan tea-garden an elderly waiter called Niemkonski. Some years before, Mr. Niemkonski had lent Miss di Pradella's father twenty-five pounds. This had never been

repaid, and Miss di Pradella had learnt that Mr. Niemkowski was now in very poor circumstances. He was, moreover, the only Viennese that Miss di Pradella knew in London. And she had heard, at the Swan tea-garden, that two days before Mr. Niemkowski had been knocked down by a motor car just outside the Swan, and that he was somewhere in some hospital. She insisted that they must go and find him. She said that Mr. Niemkowski had claims upon her honour. She spoke as if she were an aristocrat of ancient lineage.

It was a great nuisance to Macdonald. The waiter with the broken leg had a wife and three children in a back street in Ealing. These also had to be found and provided for. The two younger children were boys at school, but the eldest was a girl of fifteen, who was taking cheap dancing lessons. Macdonald promised that he would try to find her a place in the ballet of the Talavera Theatre. It was all really a great nuisance, because Macdonald had made an appointment with Mr. Pett for five o'clock at his office, and Lady Aldington's At Home was at nine. He realised that he was practically saddled with the fate of the entire Niemkowski family by the time he did arrive in Little Walden Street at seven-thirty.

Mr. Pett and Mrs. Pett, too, were waiting for him in the large room that contained the black oak table and the Chippendale chairs. Miss di Pradella herself was quite free of the place, and dropped herself into a deep armchair and began to eat pralines. Mr. Pett was exceedingly angry with Sergius Mihailovitch. He contrived by means of effective cockney hints to convey the idea that Sergius Mihailovitch had been trying to edge him out of any control of the Galizian counter-revolution. This was all the more unreasonable in that for the last week Mr. Pett had been laid up with a chill on the liver. He had indeed been so ill with it that although Macdonald had tried to see him daily, the doctors had not allowed it.

He stood before the Chippendale bureau, swinging an oak stick behind his legs. He was dressed in rather an elaborate black tail suit and carried a top-hat ; but he was wearing a blue flannel shirt, and his black eyes had what in London is called a nasty expression. He exclaimed violently :

" Look here, you, I'm the chief person in this expedition, and don't you forget it ! It's I that started the scientific reactionary movement in the world. And if you do anything, it's because you are my puppet. Understand ? "

Macdonald took out from the drawer of his bureau the deed of agreement with the Queen-Mother and the King.

" You'll see if you read this that the terms you dictated have been adhered to exactly," he said.

Mr. Pett fell vehemently upon the document as if it had been a halfpenny evening paper from which he desired to gather the result of the Boat Race.

" There is nothing in it," he said, " about my having dictated these terms."

Macdonald took a pen from the bureau. " I'll write it in the end," he said, " and sign it before a commissioner of oath."

Mr. Pett reddened beneath his fury. He swallowed in his throat, grunted under his black and pendulous moustache, and began seriously to read the document.

Macdonald turned to Mrs. Pett, who was asking Miss di Pradella what she had seen at Hampton Court. Mrs. Pett appeared rather astonished when that young lady denied having seen either the Raphaels and Van Dycks or the Orangery, the Dutch Garden or the celebrated vine.

" I must say," Mrs. Pett commented to Sergius Mihailovitch, " that you don't appear to be much of a guide for foreigners. You've shown this young lady nothing at all." And in painful and conscientious German she began to promise Miss di Pradella that she would herself take that

young lady to Hampton Court, and explain to her the true significance of that place of gardens, decapitated queens, and long picture galleries.

Macdonald explained that they had been upon an errand of mercy and that accounted for their long delay. He expressed himself as being overwhelmed with contrition.

"Yes," Mrs. Pett said seriously, "it is rather a pity. We have been waiting for all of two hours and a half."

And at hearing that Sergius Mihailovitch really became overwhelmed.

"Oh, it does not matter about me," Mrs. Pett said softly. "I can wait for ever, but——" and by signifying her wishes with her eyes, Mrs. Pett withdrew Sergius Mihailovitch to the extreme end of the room, where they sat down upon two chairs side by side against the wall.

"It's going to be a very troublesome business," she said. "If you only could bring yourself always to be punctual in an appointment with Herbert! And if only you could make it fall out that nothing at all is done without Herbert's being present, that would make it much easier."

She looked at the ground rather apprehensively. Then she continued at last:

"You know Herbert well enough. As long as he is employed he is as reasonable and cheerful as a child. And, you know, he is nearly as disinterested as you are. But keeping him waiting is dreadful. You don't know what it's been like. I thought he would do you some personal violence."

"Just because he imagined that I was trying to jockey him out of his share of the credit?" Macdonald asked.

"Just about that," Mrs. Pett said. "You see, he has got the brain of the imaginative writer although he only writes serious books. When he is kept waiting with nothing to do, his brain always gets to work, and it always gets to work upon suspicions. I tell you whilst

we've been sitting here he's been imagining that you and the King and the Queen-Mother, with troops and all the rest of it, had sailed off to Galizia, and that you were going to get yourself nominated Emperor of the Peninsula."

"But surely," Macdonald said, "he knows me well enough . . ."

Mrs. Pett put her little appealing hand gently upon his.

"It's really very serious," she said. "Just consider! Just before you came in he had gone to the telephone to 'phone the whole story to the *Daily Herald*—all about everything: you, and the Queen-Mother, and the King, and Mr. Dexter, and the Russian battleship he believed you had gone off in."

"But that would have ruined everything," Macdonald said. "If the paper had published . . ."

"My dear!" Mrs. Pett said, "my dear Sergius, my dear friend, that's what I am so afraid will still happen. That's why I so much wish that we weren't in this thing at all. Don't you understand that Herbert does not want anything out of it except that you should acknowledge that he is fit to manage everything?"

"Well, of course I acknowledge it," Macdonald said.

"Oh, but can you acknowledge it enough?" she continued, with her little air of misgiving. "You'll have to have it always in your mind. Do you know, I believe I know what will happen. One day Herbert will ask for something absolutely ridiculous. He will want to be Generalissimo of the Galizian forces or Archbishop of Batalha. He won't *want* to be it, that is to say, but he will ask for the nomination. And you will start with surprise, or you will try to prove to him that because he isn't a priest he can't possibly be made an archbishop. And then, whenever that happens, the fat will be in the fire; and if he doesn't do something horrible against you personally, he'll do something that will ruin your whole scheme."

"Oh, come," Macdonald said, "I think you're a little nervous and run down; but of course I'll keep in mind what you say. If he wants to be Galizian nominee for Pope, he shall be nominated."

"Of course you understand," Mrs. Pett said, "he'll back out of the nomination when once it is made. He's going to back out of something to-day; he will sigh that he feels it will damage him as writer to take up any other work. But what he will really mean is that he is not after anything at all for himself. Only, for goodness' sake, give him everything that he wants!"

"Oh, I'll give him the moon," Macdonald smiled. He and Mrs. Pett had been very good friends for many years.

"Of course," Mrs. Pett said rather sadly, "everything has changed in our relationships. Years ago, when Herbert was an Anarchist and you gave up all your money to him to administer, it was easy. And when he was a Socialist and you did the same thing, it was just as easy. But now you're doing the administering, and he has to run in double harness with you. It's almost as if—he feels it as if you had some sort of control over him. It was all very simple once, but now it's very complicated."

"Yes, everything is complicated," Macdonald said. "When I look back on any of my former phases—whether it was Houndsditch, or Putney, or even at Wiesbaden with the Grand Duke, it looks like the simplest life in the world. Now I simply don't know where I am. And it goes on growing. Yesterday I seemed to be independent and in a country cottage; to-day I simply don't know where my responsibilities begin and end. To-day I have picked up a waiter called Niemkonski and a hungry family. And, upon my soul, when it's all over and done with, I don't believe I've got ten pounds in the bank. Besides, I've got to go to Lady Aldington's some time to-night and am not dressed yet."

"Oh, we are all going to Lady Aldington's," Mrs. Pett said. "And we aren't dressed. We aren't going to be."

Macdonald looked at her questioningly.

"Oh, that's Herbert's idea of to-day," she continued. "He says he won't go into the halls of the great and pretend that he has forgotten his humble origin. That's why he has put on a blue shirt with a black coat. You know Herbert."

"Oh, I know Herbert," Macdonald laughed. "At any rate, he's quite serene now."

Mr. Pett had thrown the document on to the black oak table. He was smiling complacently down upon it. He looked across at them, and suddenly he called from the end of the room :

"That's a famous piece of work. You couldn't have got anyone to do better than me. And you'll see it will work out to a 't.' I'll bet this will be the model constitution for all the kings that ever get restored to their thrones after this. And that is mine."

"Well, you'd better copyright it at once," Macdonald called back to him.

"Oh, blow all that ! " Mr. Pett answered. He looked at the table and blushed uneasily all over his face. "You don't suppose," he said, and he shuffled his feet, "that I was in earnest when I said that I wanted any of the credit of the thing. I am an author, that's what I am. This kind of business is only recreation for me."

Macdonald was approaching him slowly along the table to get at some more papers that were in the bureau behind Mr. Pett's back.

"At any rate," he said, "the whole credit of the central idea is yours. It took your scientific, economic mind to originate that."

Mr. Pett shuffled still more with his feet and became more and more modestly crimson.

"Oh, rot!" he mumbled so that his words were hardly distinguishable. "The original idea was put into my head by a chap called Vincent. He was the *Daily Herald's* correspondent at Flores. And one day he happened to say to me at the club that any Galizian might be bought for eight and fourpence—eight thousand picados and by remitting his taxes for a year. . . . That gave me the idea of the whole thing. From that to calculating the population of Galizia and multiplying it by eight and fourpence was a perfectly simple matter. The population of Galizia is three million, and three million times eight and fourpence is, roughly speaking, one million five hundred thousand pounds."

"Still," Macdonald said, a little indistinctly over the papers in the drawer that he had pulled out, "it was certainly your idea—to bribe the whole population." Macdonald was glad that he was able to keep his face averted. It wasn't the sort of idea he would himself have been glad to have. But Mr. Pett immediately became animated.

"Yes, it is splendid," he said. "It's altogether one of the most splendid ideas that ever came into a man's head. It's simply that of Columbus and the egg. Taking the ordinary household of Galizia at five persons and accounting for the precious few who won't want to be bribed, it means that every head of the house will get about three pounds ten, and as living only costs them about seven pounds a year per family, that means that the whole of Galizia will live free for six months. In addition, we remit all direct taxation for the first two years of the new reign. Don't you see it means the Golden Age for Galizia?"

And Mr. Pett grinned a little, unscrupulous cockney grin as if he had succeeded in cheating successfully at a game of cards played for beans. But immediately his manner changed to one of truculent morality.

"Mind you," he blared out threateningly, though at no one in particular, "this thing is perfectly moral. Absolutely! Mind that! . . . The business of the state is to provide for the material happiness of its people. That's all a state can do, and the only way it can do it is by means of economics. Our scheme is perfectly moral because it's perfectly sound economically. It may not be picturesque. That's not my business as an economist. We give a starved people six months of peace and plenty and two years of relief from the burden of taxation in order to recover from times of disturbance. During those two years we develop the enormous mineral resources of the kingdom, which have never been developed because there has never been a period of two undisturbed years in the history of Galizia. That's perfectly sound. If the republican ministry could do anything nearly as good for the country it would not be moral to displace them. But the republican ministry cannot. It can't establish confidence. It can't maintain peace. It can't find capital. We can."

"Oh, it's all right, Pett," Macdonald said cheerfully and with a soothing manner, "you aren't addressing a public meeting. We all know that."

He approached Mr. Pett from behind with his papers. Mr. Pett began once more to blush.

"Of course I know I'm not addressing a public meeting," he said, "but it does no harm to restate these first principles. It makes the ground feel firmer under my feet. You don't seem to see that all this is a great responsibility for me. You don't seem to see how serious it all is. Besides," he added, with a new access of aggressiveness, "I know that in your damned aristocratic silliness you sneer at my scheme because it isn't picturesque. And the more often you hear that it's sound, moral, and beneficent to an oppressed people, the more often you get jolly well snubbed in your silly pride."

Mr. Pett's voice had become high and shrill with a sort of impish malice, but he dropped it again to pleasanter tones in order to exclaim: "Besides, it's all rot to say that I deserve all the credit of the thing. It isn't true, and it is putting too great a responsibility upon me. It was I that worked out the idea—but with me it was purely theoretic. . . . A sort of a game. It was you, Macdonald, who thought of putting it into practice. So you ought to have all the practical credit. I only got an idea from a man called Vincent. You're going to do it."

"Well, since we are making confessions," Macdonald said pleasantly, "I don't mind confessing that I got my idea from a man called Austin Evans. Austin Evans is an American-Welsh filibuster when he isn't a sensational journalist. He came up one day to me in my club and asked me if I wouldn't join an expedition that was going to steal ivory from the King of the Nigombi. He had got together one hundred and fifty British and American desperados, and they were going to make a raid from Rhodesian territory. If the poor old king tried to resist them, they would declare that he had attacked them by armed force. And the Chartered Company were all ready to annex Nigombi. That is how the British Empire grows."

"Oh, we know all about that," Mr. Pett said; "for the matter of that I know Austin Evans a little fat, fiery chap."

"But," Macdonald continued, "the point was that when I didn't consent to go with him to Central Africa, Austin Evans offered for fifty thousand pounds to make me president of any small South American Republic with a seacoast that I might point out on the map. For that sum he was going to hire a battleship, fill it with English desperados, and threaten to blow any seaport capital off the map of South America."

"But you aren't going to trust a little, lying black-guard like Austin Evans?" Mr. Pett said contemptuously.

"Oh, I'm not going to trust him," Macdonald answered, "but I'm going to thank him for giving me an idea. It's the idea of the younger son and the armed black sheep of this peaceful country. For you can say what you like, my Pett, we shan't get hold of Flores without some sort of pretence at an armed threat."

"Oh, you can have your silly old battleship if you want it," Mr. Pett grumbled amiably. "It's a useless expense, but I'll sanction it. I know you must get the picturesque element into this show by hook or by crook. You're the spoiled child of this particular dark forest that I've made so damned clear to you."

"If you wouldn't mind not talking so much," Macdonald said, "and if you would just look over these papers! —they contain the approximate figures for the cost of practically everything, and as you have entire financial control I want you to sanction every item."

With an astonishing want of loquacity Mr. Pett exclaimed only, "All right." He caught hold of the large bundle of papers that Macdonald held out to him, and he crushed them into one or other of the pockets of his black coat.

"You've got to remember," he exclaimed fragmentarily, "that I'm a thinker. An economist . . . Um —um . . . not a book-keeper." And then he called out:

"Come along, Anne! We've got to go and eat and go on to Lady Aldington's." He disappeared from the room with the sudden scuffle of an alarmed rabbit, and they heard him dropping his top-hat and swearing amongst the automobiles in the garage.

Macdonald had all along been aware that Mrs. Pett was conversing in undertones with Miss di Pradella, just as he knew very well that she was keeping a careful ear for

everything that passed between himself and Mr. Pett. And now both these ladies approached him. . . .

"I'm going," Mrs. Pett said, "to take this young lady to Lady Aldington's after we've had a little simple supper together."

Macdonald uttered a rather appalled "But——"

Mrs. Pett continued: "Oh, it's all right; all sorts of people go to Lady Aldington's, and we take whom we like. And it will be an education for Miss di Pradella. Education is always an excellent thing."

Macdonald said: "Well, well." He could not see that any particular harm could come of it. And the two ladies followed Mr. Pett.

Miss di Pradella was smiling radiantly for no particular reason. Macdonald had never discovered in her the faintest trace of a desire for social advancement. She never seemed to want to know anybody or to talk to anybody, but she spent hours of perfect contentment in poring over her clean washing.

Macdonald descended into his basement and began to dress. But he had not been at it for more than five minutes when Mr. Pett ran into the room. His hair was very dishevelled, and he began to pull papers out of his pocket and to throw them on to the bed.

"Look here, Macdonald," he exclaimed, "I am a scientist! A profound thinker needing tranquil conditions and leisure! I can't take up the financial control of this thing. I really can't. It would take too much of my time."

Macdonald said: "Well, well."

"I feel like a swine," Mr. Pett said, "throwing all this new responsibility and work upon you. But I really can't do it. I really can't."

Macdonald said: "All right. Leave the papers on the bed."

And Mr. Pett went away. Macdonald continued his dressing. He had got into his shirt and trousers when once more Mr. Pett entered :

"Look here, Macdonald," he said, and he began to stammer painfully : "I feel like a swine—a mean hound. But about the money. I can't raise it."

"What money ? " Macdonald asked.

"The money for the expedition," Mr. Pett stammered. "I promised to raise half of it from my friends."

In the first flush and arrogant glory of his new idea for a revolution Mr. Pett had enthusiastically undertaken to raise at least half the money that would be needed. In his capacity as a journalist writing upon social matters and attracting a great deal of attention, Mr. Pett had met not only a great many political peers, but a great many very rich men. And because he always lectured them with great arrogance whilst they listened to him with the greatest respect, Mr. Pett imagined that he was really intimate with men who controlled millions and millions of money. But upon his approaching Lord Egdon the banker, and the Hon. Samuel Isaacstein, who was one of the directors of the Resiliens Company as well as Mr. Hutt, the director of the Great Southern Railway, Mr. Pett had been received with such a blank polite and attentive inattention that his whole acute soul had become panic-stricken. He had realised because the attitude of all these distinguished men had been so similar, although they were each of them so entirely indifferent—he had realised that not one of all the wealthy and eminent men that he knew would have anything to do with the speculation that he was proposing. It was this panic that had made him ill. That had made him desire to spoil the whole scheme by exposing it in the *Daily Herald*. If he could not raise the money the thing was going to be a failure. He could not see how Macdonald was going to do it, for he regarded Macdonald with an

intellectual contempt. And Mr. Pett thought he could not afford to be connected with failures. He had wanted to pull out of it altogether ; he had wanted to smash it, to ruin it. But that was only panic. The sight of Macdonald's cheerful and cool smile, the sight of the documents ; the news that Mr. Dexter was anxious to provide half the money ;—all these things had restored to Mr. Pett almost all his original keenness. More particularly he was delighted with the view of his own scheme for the constitution of Galizia, carefully engrossed in a legal hand with the fat, red royal seals attached to it. This was his own fineness that he saw before him. And there had remained only the one mortifying thing—the confession he had to make that he had been unable to raise the money.

“ I can't do it,” he said. “ I could if I weren't a philosopher before everything. But I have my duty to my age. I've been thinking it over. It wouldn't be right for me to distract my attention. Of course, I'll give you some letters of introduction.”

“ Oh, it's all right,” Macdonald said. “ I'll attend to the money. Don't bother.”

And Mr. Pett went away with deep peace in his soul. Whilst Macdonald continued his dressing, he read in a hurry several letters that he had found upon his return. Four were invitations ; there were letters ordering cars ; one was from a firm of solicitors whose name he did not know asking him to make an appointment to discuss a matter which they did not specify ; and the last was a polite intimation from his bank that his account was overdrawn by the sum of eleven shillings and threepence. This was very worrying, because he had to provide for Miss di Pradella's expenses next morning and he was very much hurried to get to Lady Aldington's, whilst he hadn't in his pocket enough money to pay for a cab. He walked to Leicester House.

Lady Aldington gave him just one glance from amongst a great group of diversely attired persons. She did not smile, but her eyes rested seriously upon his. He did not get a word with her. Instead he heard the whole of Dr. Farquhar's speech on the Nationalisation of Scottish Railways.

IV

KINTYRE had dropped a gold cigar case in the garden at Countess Macdonald's. But it wasn't for two days that he remembered about it. And then he remembered with extreme clearness. He had just been going to take a cigar when the Countess had swung herself out of the hammock to pour some milk into Lady Aldington's tea. The cigar case had slipped out of his hand just as he sprang forward—for at times, when he felt the situation to demand it, he could behave with all the rigid politeness of a foreigner. He had sprung forward to relieve the Countess of her milk jug, and the cigar case had slipped from his fingers into the grass. The grass was quite long, being in seed, and Kintyre's operations with the milk jug having taken a minute or so, he had forgotten all about the cigar case in watching attentively what he considered to be the interesting position.

He could not get out of his head the idea that his cousin and Macdonald were what he called "*au mieux*," for before his succession to the title, Kintyre had passed the greater part of his time abroad. And just because his first impression of his cousin Emily had been received at the interview between himself and Sergius Mihailovitch and the Grand Duke, his first impression of the situation that existed between his cousin and Macdonald had been one of great intimacy. He had himself very quickly become intimate with Emily Aldington. But there was nothing remarkable in that,

because they had merely taken up the cousinly relations that they had dropped when they were thirteen and fourteen, after which date the old Duke had very sharply separated them.

A bachelor not particularly rich for his station, and having let his town house, so that he lived more or less permanently at Claridge's, Kintyre found that he was going to have a very agreeable *pied-à-terre* at Leicester House. He even found it pleasant to make a fool of Aldington. But although he had been in and out of the house almost every day since their return from Wiesbaden, he had not heard his cousin mention Macdonald's name once, until the afternoon when Emily Aldington had suggested that he should go down with her to return the call—the extraordinary, stiff, silent call—that the Countess had paid to Lady Aldington in her saloon carriage between Rudesheim and Ehrenbreitstein. Going down to Putney, Kintyre had made one or two polite references to Macdonald, whom for the matter of that he really liked. He was not in the least inspired by curiosity. If it suited, or if it was necessary for Emily to be "*au mieux*" with Sergius Mihailovitch, he entirely approved. It was none of his business however to inquire into the matter. But, on the other hand, it was entirely his duty as a gentleman to show some interest in his cousin's complement. So, as if he really desired information, he began to ask a few questions about Macdonald's opinions, what he was doing, and why his wife lived at Putney?

Emily Aldington, in the motor going down, had answered with what might have been perfect openness or with what might have been careful reserve. She had seen Macdonald, she said, only four or five times, but once or twice for rather long periods. They had had a good deal of talk, and she had found him extraordinarily pleasant and sympathetic. She had found him, she said, one of the

nicest men she had ever met, and she wished she could see more of him. But she didn't know very clearly what his occupations were, and during the autumn sitting of the House she was so taken up by her political duties that she could not expect to see much of Macdonald, who was anything rather than a Whig. Indeed, Lady Aldington's duties as a political hostess were that year unusually heavy. She usually did the official receptions for the Minister of the Fine Arts, who was a bachelor and quite a poor man. But during August, the wives of two cabinet ministers had died, and Lady Aldington had, as a matter of course, taken over during the period of mourning whatever of the social side of those ministries was indispensable.

"It's the misfortune," she sighed, "of being so very much the richest person, and having so very much the largest house of one's party. But I hope I shall see Count Macdonald this afternoon, though I've heard someone say that he doesn't live with his wife."

Altogether Kintyre had gathered that Lady Aldington knew very little of Macdonald's affairs, however much she might have penetrated and have appreciated his character and his disposition. He remained silent for a minute or two, and then he leaned forward to the little rack in the motor before them and laid his hand upon her ladyship's engagement book. He asked permission to look at it, and ran through its pages for the next month or so. There were not many blanks amongst all the names of societies for the promotion of or for the suppression of one thing or another. But here and there there was an evening free, and here and there a lunch time or an afternoon. Kintyre took out the little pencil from the back of the book.

"What are you doing?" Emily asked.

A minute or so later he handed her the book to look at. Across each one of the blank spaces he had written: Kintyre."

"And what does that mean?" Emily Aldington asked.

"It means, my dear," Kintyre answered, "that there are a great many too many flannel shirts in your engagement book."

"I don't in the least understand you," Lady Aldington said.

"Oh, think about it," the Duke answered. "They may not all wear flannel shirts, but whatever they do wear you're a great deal too lonely. I don't at all like the looks of you. Why do you stare so straight in front of you?"

"I am only watching the traffic," Emily answered; "Jenkins drives almost too skilfully."

"Ah, but you don't need to watch the traffic when you're among the flannel shirts," Kintyre answered, "and you do it just as much then as now."

"Well, I'm pretty tired," Emily conceded.

"Tired and lonely and done," Kintyre answered. "You can't keep it up. No, you can't. That's why I've taken those spaces in the book. You won't have to watch the traffic where I'll drive you. I am as lonely as you are, really. So let's just join forces and work together."

Emily laughed: "I should think that would be rather fun," she said. "Thank you, Kintyre."

Kintyre indeed really liked his cousin well enough to take a little trouble for her. Besides, he quite genuinely wanted something to do, and he didn't see why he shouldn't play providence to his cousin. His cousin was vastly richer than he, and, he considered, vastly more virtuous and more deserving. Besides, his motives were just a little complicated by the fact that obviously Emily knew nothing at all about the Galizian counter-revolution. And Kintyre was interested in Galizia.

He owed that fact to a sort of lazy malice that he felt against his uncle—really, it was his great-uncle—the late Duke. The late Duke had added a large fortune to his

other large fortunes by developing the province of Batalha. As a matter of fact, the late Duke had been an extraordinarily good and persistent business man. There was undoubtedly a touch of Jewish blood in all of their house. Kintyre himself wasn't in the least interested in business ; he didn't in the least want to be much richer than he was. But eighteen months ago, at the breaking out of the Galizian revolution, it had struck him that it would be rather fun to do a little dabbling in Galizian land. He hadn't at that date reopened his acquaintance with Emily, and he regarded her with a certain malice as being the person who had inherited alike the title and the fortune of Batalha. It had struck him, in fact, that it would be rather fun to stick a pin into the ghost of his disagreeable old uncle by making himself a huge fortune out of Galizia. Thus, at the outset of the revolution he had gone to that distressed country. He had taken a mining engineer with him, and the two had spent an enjoyable month or so in poking about amongst rocky sided and precipitous valleys where there were only mule tracks, mud huts, and cheese. Afterwards the Duke alone had spent a week or two in the city of Flores. Here he had spent his time amongst what he regarded as a crowd of dirty republicans. And at the end of those weeks he was in the possession of a great district of confiscated land, bordering on the provinces of Gallegos and Batalha. He had, that is to say, purchased the title to these lands at a price so small as clearly to show him that the republican ministers, who put the money into their own pockets, did not expect to remain in power for more than a few months at the very outside. Then Kintyre had returned to London, where he had had a number of interviews with several Galizian noblemen, whom he regarded as being a little more dirty than the republican ministers. As the result of these interviews the Duke had found himself in possession of the royalist rights to the same stretch of

territory. He had paid almost nothing for them, for the dirty noblemen were depressed and nearly starving. So that altogether Kintyre possessed the double rights to a district of almost a hundred thousand acres, for which he hadn't paid much more than as many sovereigns.

And, upon the whole, he very decidedly desired the restoration of the royalists. As far as he understood the present negotiations, in that case his stretch of land would lie between the province of Gallegos, which would be very surely settled by the American speculators, and the province of Batalha, which, by the power of Lady Aldington and her factor, was at least as settled as the county of Cornwall. In that way Kintyre's property would become almost inevitably susceptible of vast developments.

So that it had been with feelings of polite curiosity that Kintyre had watched the interview between his cousin and the Countess during their short call.

He hadn't gathered very much from it, except the fact that the Countess had waited on Lady Aldington at tea. The Countess had done this in the most vigilantly polite manner, pouring in milk, cream of which there had been a small quantity in a pewter can, and anxiously pressing upon Emily her own home-made jam. Emily hadn't "noticed" anything, but the Duke, who wasn't as used as she was to oddities of advanced thought, found Countess Macdonald a most extraordinary woman. He had never really imagined anyone just like her. So that all together he had been extremely glad to remember that he had dropped his cigar case into the long grass. He really wanted to deepen his acquaintance with the Countess. He did.

He drove down to Putney in a hansom, for he had gathered that the Countess disapproved of all kinds of motor vehicles, and he expected her to open the door herself. The door, however, was opened by a very large and quite unmistakable butler. This gentleman showed Kintyre into a room that

that nobleman could only regard as odd. On the table were an immense quantity of uncovered pots of jam. The walls were covered with brown paper, the decoration of one wall limiting itself to three large brass warming-pans. The room also contained a grandfather's clock and four large oak chests, whilst on one wall was a large coloured reproduction of an early Italian Annunciation. There were not any chairs, so Kintyre sat himself down on one of the oak chests. He waited a long time ; he waited an interminable time. He had never been kept waiting for so long. At last there came in Miss Dexter, who told him that the Countess would be down in a few minutes. She was dressing herself. . . .

" Well, she needn't have taken the trouble for me," the Duke said.

" I guess she didn't know it was you," the young lady answered. " She thought it was Count Macdonald. We were making jam. At least, we were tying paper on to the tops of the jam-pots."

" And does the Countess always dress herself when she expects Macdonald ? " Kintyre asked.

" I guess I don't know," Miss Dexter answered. " I guess I'm not privileged enough yet to know so much about the workings of this wonderful household. Don't you think it's a wonderful household ? "

The Duke surveyed the jam-pots, the warming-pans, and the tall clock.

" I am afraid," he said, " that I'm even less privileged than you are. But it does appear certainly to be a wonderful household."

" Oh, it is ! " Miss Dexter exclaimed. " These are a most wonderful people. I've seen Count Macdonald several times. He's the most wonderful man in the world. He takes me shopping, and I just adore him. He knows all the Stores and just where you buy everything. And the

Countess is the most wonderful woman in the world. I only had the privilege of meeting her twice—the other day when you were here and to-day. She's let me help her tying up the jam, and I just adore her for it."

"Well, it does seem a reason for adoring her," the Duke said.

"Oh, I am so glad that you see that," Miss Dexter answered; "but, of course, you're sympathetic. I guess you're some great poet. I didn't catch your name when you were here the other day."

"Oh, I am only Kintyre," the Duke answered.

"Now, that's a pity," Miss Dexter said. "You ought to be a poet. You look like one. And the best poets of England come to read their poems to Countess Macdonald. She says so. And if I was to be disappointed in not seeing the Count, I did think I was going to be privileged to be present at a reading."

Kintyre explained that he had only come to fetch his cigar case. And at that moment the Countess herself came into the room, very splendidly attired in a ruby velvet dress.

When she entered, her face, as Kintyre made it out, was carefully arranged in an expression of contempt and of haughty reproof, so that he considered himself to be receiving the full force of her greeting for her husband. But the moment she perceived Kintyre, he seemed to see three separate expressions come over her vivid features. There was certainly disappointment about the lines of the mouth just as there was certainly a touch of tears in each of the hard eyes, and without doubt a touch, a sudden fire—of curiosity. Kintyre certainly thought the Countess the most extraordinary woman he had ever met, but he certainly thought that at that moment he understood her, as he considered himself to understand every woman. She had without doubt put on her extravagantly blazing dress

for the sake of her husband's eyes. She wished to prove how desirable she was, and at the same time she intended to make him what Kintyre would have called a hell of a scene.

But he simply had not come ; that was why her eyes for a minute had had tears in them. The curiosity meant, he was perfectly certain, that she hoped he, Kintyre, had come as some sort of ambassador from her husband. He could tell perfectly well that this fierce and arrogant spirit was in the habit of raging up and down that room with the hard furniture. He imagined her pacing up and down like one of the great caged cats waiting for a man whose presence she passionately desired, and whom she would overwhelm with outrages the moment he appeared. And he never, Kintyre realised, came at all. And Kintyre knew, when he said that he himself came only to recover his cigar case, that he was inflicting upon her a severe wound. But in that moment he was so very much in the middle of an exciting affair that he hadn't any time, coolly selfish as he was, for more psychology. For Her Excellency became at once calm and decided, and exclaimed :

" Oh, it was your cigar case ? I thought it was Sergius Mihailovitch's. So I sold it."

The Duke exclaimed—he couldn't think of anything else to exclaim :

" That's very considerate ! "

The Countess was quite composed. " Sergius Mihailovitch," she said, " has no right to have such things. It was gold with a coronet of diamonds, and it had a button of one large ruby."

" Oh, I know what it was like," Kintyre said. " And I'll allow that it was rather gorgeous, but it was a present from my mother. I should certainly not have bought such a thing."

" Then you'll admit," the Countess said triumphantly,

"that it wasn't at all the sort of thing that was fitting for Sergius Mihailovitch's position."

"I shouldn't at all like to dictate the conduct of Count Macdonald," the Duke said. "I don't know him well enough."

"Well, I do," the Countess said.

And in the silence that followed for a moment Miss Dexter, who sat upon the chest beside Kintyre, with her eyes very wide, and her lips apart, exclaimed :

"I think it perfectly thrilling that I should be allowed to be present at this interview. It's a privilege."

"It certainly is," Kintyre said ; "but it seems an odd one."

"It's not in the least odd !" the Countess exclaimed. "You're both friends of Sergius Mihailovitch ; you're both members of the Smart Set. I wish Sergius Mihailovitch's friends exactly to understand what I'm doing. I wish to act in public. I've nothing to be ashamed of. Nothing ! Sergius Mihailovitch has no business with a cigar case like that. He has no business with cigars at all ! They're above his station !"

"But, my dear lady," the Duke said, "his station is at least as good as my own."

"I say nothing about that," the lady said. "I only say that cigars are things I disapprove of. So, of course, when I saw a cigar case like that apparently in the possession of Sergius Mihailovitch . . ."

"But it wasn't in the possession of Sergius Mihailovitch, you know," the Duke said. "And even if it had been, you might pretty certainly have argued that he hadn't bought it. Men practically never buy cigar cases like that. They're nearly always presents from their women friends."

"That's what I thought," the Countess said. "That's why I sold this one."

"But that wouldn't have been the way to make yourself popular with your husband," the Duke said.

"I haven't the least desire to make myself popular with my husband," the Countess said. "I only desire to drag him from his vicious courses."

"But really," Kintyre exclaimed, "this wasn't a vicious course of Count Macdonald's. It wasn't even really a vicious course of mine. It's all very complicated, and it will just show you how difficult these questions are. That cigar case was presented to me by my venerable mother because she wanted to redeem *me* from what she considered was a vicious course. If you'd opened that cigar case you'd have found that it was full of cheap cigarettes. That's my vicious habit. I haven't any taste in tobacco, and I prefer a cheap cigarette to the best cigar. That was a real grief always to my mother. She thought that cheap cigarettes were below my station. So she gave me that cigar case—and she made it as gorgeous as she could, dear old lady,—because she thought it would bribe me to smoke cigars. She gave it me as soon as I came into the title. It didn't matter, she thought, so much what I smoked as long as I was a commoner. But when I became a Duke . . ." Kintyre broke off and gazed amiably at the Countess . . . "See how difficult you women make it for us men. I've tried honestly to smoke cigars. But I can't! They make me sick. So I've to cram my mother's cigar case with cheap cigarettes. And I can't help thinking that it's dishonourable of me. You see, whenever my mother sees me, she sees the cigar case, and it comforts her to think that I'm behaving in a manner proper to my station. But all the while I'm not. No, my dear lady, don't exact from your men folk too high a standard. They can't live up to it."

"But all this is perfectly thrilling!" Miss Dexter exclaimed to Kintyre. "But why didn't you tell me you

were a duke, at first ? It would have made it all so much easier to understand. And I do so much want to understand everything. Don't you see, I should have been able to take such a much more intelligent interest if I'd known from the start that you were one of the dissolute and worthless Smart Set that Mrs. Macdonald has told me so much about."

"Oh, well, I am a beastly duke," Kintyre said. "And it you'll just take time you can revise your impressions all right."

"You know," Miss Dexter continued, "all this struggle is perfectly thrilling to me."

"What struggle ?" Kintyre asked.

"Oh, *the* struggle," Miss Dexter answered ; "the one that's going on between you of the Smart Set and Mrs. Macdonald here for the possession of her husband. It's an epic contest !"

Kintyre reflected for a minute. "I should think Macdonald wouldn't like it," he said ; "I should think he'd dislike it extremely—to have it conducted so much in public."

"It doesn't matter what he likes or dislikes," the Countess said decidedly. "If he wants to have to do with me, he's got to consider what I approve of."

The Duke said nothing. The Countess looked at Miss Dexter.

"If you want to get a true impression of the case, you've got to consider that the Duke is lying all the time," she said ; "he is trying to shield his cousin Lady Aldington."

Miss Dexter said : "Oh, you're a cousin of *the* Lady Aldington who is going to be the co-respondent."

"The legal term for the guilty woman," the Countess said grimly, "is intervener, not co-respondent."

The Duke sat very still. At last he asked : "And what has poor Emily done, pray ?"

"Oh, I dare say," the Countess said, "that you think that if I give you information about the case you'll be able to lie a way out of it. But you can't. I've seen their goings-on with my own eyes. You can't bribe me out of the witness box."

"You know," the Duke said slowly. "I don't know much about the case. I didn't even know there was any case. . . ."

"Of course you'd say that!" the Countess exclaimed. With her high colour, her penetrating glance, and her back square against the door, she was aware, from the look in Kintyre's hardy dark eyes, that she looked extremely handsome. And Kintyre laughed:

"I don't know anything about it," he said, "but I believe my cousin Emily is as innocent as a dewdrop."

"Oh, I know your innocent women!" the Countess said. "She's a poor, weak, little fool. I don't bear her any malice. But she has got to go through with it. I'm really sorry for her; for one day Sergius Mihailovitch will throw her over and come back to me. He's bound to!"

Kintyre looked at the floor. "I should say he was," he said, "and that makes it all the more of a pity that you should alienate his affections by bringing absurd charges now. At least, for the life of me, I believe they're absurd charges."

"A judge and jury won't think they're absurd charges," the Countess said, with a high scorn. "She's been to his rooms at night. I've seen her. I've kept watch."

"The deuce you have!" Kintyre exclaimed.

"I've seen it with my own eyes," she went on, and her excitement began to grow. "I saw them meet in a dark passage. And I saw them come back four hours afterwards. And I saw her go into his detestable rooms. Do you suppose I don't know what his detestable rooms are for?"

Kintyre was really exceedingly puzzled. He couldn't doubt the lady's entire sincerity.

"I don't understand," he said. "I don't really understand how she could possibly have found the time since he has been back. I was looking at her engagement book only just now, and I assure you that from the day after we all came back from Wiesbaden there has not been a single night that she hasn't had some sort of Congress or public meeting or dinner of her own. Not a single night!"

The Countess looked at him with a hard, ironic exaltation. "That may be true," she said. "I dare say he has had enough of her. I suspected as much." And then she added slowly: "You were careful to say that her ladyship was engaged every night from the night after the one on which we came back from Wiesbaden." Her voice became slower and slower. "The night I mean was the night on which we came back. Yes, I suspected that he had had enough of her. He has not been nearly so assiduous since. That was why I pitied her and was kind to her when she called with you the other day. She may try to bribe him back with cigar cases. But she won't get him. He doesn't even take care of what she gives. He drops it in the grass for me to find. I dare say he wanted me to find it, so as to be able to boast of his conquest. But I have done the right thing. I've sold it. And I've paid the money to my lawyers. Sergius Mihailovitch will be legally responsible for the costs of the case, and he won't be able to pay them, so that he won't be able to complain if I've sold the disgusting thing."

The Duke was looking at the floor. The lady spoke with so much conviction. And he was so used to the frailties of human nature in divorce cases that for a moment he believed that he must himself be a little mad. It was almost as if his own cigar case didn't belong to himself.

"Didn't you notice," he asked slowly, "that the coronet on the case was a duke's?"

"I did," she answered. "And that woman calls herself the Duchess of Batalha."

"But the arms!" Kintyre said; "the arms were my arms."

"So are the arms of the Duchy of Batalha," the Countess answered. "You can't get out of it in that way."

Kintyre delivered a long, hard glance to the lady's dress.

"I don't know whether you'll believe that I am the sort of man not to care twopence whether my cousin is in a divorce case or not?"

"Oh, I can quite believe you're that sort of man," she answered.

"Then perhaps you believe," he tried it on, "that I'm the sort of man who'd prefer not to see *you* make an unholy fool of yourself."

"I don't know about that," she answered dubiously.

"A most unholy fool," the Duke said. He looked at the ground and continued to talk musingly. "At first I believed that you had got hold of something against Emily Aldington. But you haven't! You've simply made an uncommonly silly fool of yourself over that. The silliest sort of fool! You've just mistaken the lady."

"Oh, I know," the Countess said contemptuously. "I've had the silliest sort of letter from Sergius Mihailovitch himself. He says it was some girl he picked up off the streets. But I know better than to believe that lie. I know Sergius Mihailovitch better than to believe that lie. I know Sergius Mihailovitch better. I know very well that you would come to me with that tale. But Sergius Mihailovitch isn't the sort of man to pick up girls off the street."

The Duke continued to look at the ground. "Any man,"

he said slowly, "is any sort of man, some time or other, you know."

"But not Sergius Mihailovitch," the Countess said firmly; "I know him better."

"Then all I can say is," Kintyre exclaimed, and he spoke for the first time quickly, "I don't see, if you can idealise our friend Macdonald to that extent, why you can't just go the whole way and see that Macdonald has had nothing whatever to do with Emily Aldington. I don't see why you should want to play Macdonald's game so thoroughly, or Emily Aldington's game so thoroughly, supposing she really had a desire to poach your husband?"

"I don't understand you," the Countess said; "you appear to be talking nonsense."

The Duke gave a negligent, side glance to Miss Dexter.

"If you would kindly ask your little friend," he said,— "if you'd kindly ask her to go and ask your butler if he happens to have the *Morning Post* of the day after we came back from Wiesbaden . . ."

"This appears to be nonsense," the Countess said.

"Oh no, it isn't nonsense," the Duke said; "butlers always read the *Morning Post*. They love it; they sleep with it under their pillows, and they always file it for reference. And if your young friend will get the *Morning Post* of the 14th of September, you will be able to read in it that amongst the guests at a dinner of fifty and a ball of two hundred that followed it on the 13th of September there are figured Lord and Lady Aldington."

For just a moment the Countess hesitated, but then with vehemence she continued:

"Do you suppose that you can take me in with that lie? I tell you I knew it would happen. I felt it in Sergius Mihailovitch's manner. I knew when he pushed me brutally into a cab and packed me off to Putney, that he was going to meet that woman. So I slipped out of the

cab and waited outside his rooms, and I saw what I knew I was going to see." She choked in her throat. "I hardly needed to use my eyes at all. I knew what I was going to see. It was the end of the world for me."

Kintyre continued to stare at the ground. "You never used your eyes at all," he said. "If you'll send for the *Morning Post* you can read the names of two hundred and fifty people who can prove to you that your eyes were mistaken."

And then suddenly the Countess appeared to wither. "That was all that was needed," she said, and her voice shook with painful sobs.

"Wasn't it enough that I've lost all I had in the world? Wasn't it enough that they should meet? And now you've got up this conspiracy even to cheat me of my revenge. Of course you can get two hundred and fifty people to back you up in your lies. You all hang together. All you dissolute and idle people who have tricked my man away from me . . ."

The Duke suddenly stood up. "Look here," he said. "I'm not going to listen to this sentimental flap-doodle. It's not what I am here for. I'm not here for anything at all. But when you're calling me a liar and I'm calling you an ass, it amuses me. Watering cans don't amuse me. Besides, they don't suit your queenly style. You're a charming woman when you're denouncing anybody. You look fine! But I'm not going to stop and see you at your second best, grizzling over a husband you haven't lost at all. And that you won't lose at all, if you don't go on playing this silly fool game. So just send your little American friend for the *Morning Post* and convince yourself."

Miss Dexter had sat all the time as still as a motionless mouse. But now she said pathetically:

"I guess you want me out of the room, Mr. Duke. I guess you want to say some things in private to

Mrs. Macdonald. I guess I've got to go, but I wish I hadn't to."

Kintyre looked at her amiably. "My dear little girl," he said, "I really guess you have guessed what I want. Of course, I ought not to be embarrassed by your presence. I ought to be used to discussing the most intimate secrets of my family before outsiders. But I can't. I am sorry. It's class prejudice. It's the misfortune of my birth, but I do wish you would run away."

"I really don't know why she should," the Countess said. "Personally, I want the whole world to know how I deal with Sergius Mihailovitch."

"Well, you can tell the young lady all about it in private afterwards," Kintyre said amiably. "I don't mind what you say. Only, I can't talk with real equanimity before outsiders."

"Oh, but Mr. Duke," Miss Dexter said, "you've been talking just beautifully, though I dare say it's nothing to what you can do. But *don't* call me an outsider. I'm going, but *don't* call me that. Why, I am in the very heart and soul of it. I'm just thrilling to know whether you will get him away from us, or whether we shall win him back. Isn't it so, Mrs. Macdonald?"

"Well, that's really touching," the Duke said. "I understand that you side with the Countess and the Simple Life against us, who are—what is it?—the dissolute and idle Smart Set. And our friend Macdonald is a sort of Tannhäuser whose present address is the Venusberg? That's about it, isn't it? And the Countess is whatever the heroine's name was, and you're the heroine's confidante? Well, it's all very touching; but now run away. And the next time you see me, don't call me Mr. Duke. Call me Duke. And after you've known me a fortnight, for propriety's sake, call me Kintyre, because I don't like always hearing my title. But you just take my tip and

call the Countess here Countess Macdonald all the time, because she's a Socialist. And she likes to hear her title. That's how people are built in this country."

When the door had closed on Miss Dexter he walked straight upon the Countess and took both her hands, for he was quite decided that the only way to deal with that woman was the crudest and the harshest. And he had come to the conclusion that Macdonald never could have done anything with her at all, and never was going to, simply because he couldn't be crude and he couldn't be harsh.

"Now, look here!" he exclaimed. "What is it you want? Because you're behaving atrociously."

She tried to draw her hands away. But she left them where they were after a little, hardly noticeable, resistance.

"What the devil is it you want?" he asked again. "You don't want money. You don't want to please. You just want to raise hell."

"I want Sergius Mihailovitch back," she said slowly; "if I don't get him, I'll ruin him, body and soul."

"Oh, his soul's all right," the Duke said. "You can't touch that. And I don't exactly see how you're going to ruin his body."

"Well, I do," she said. "He thinks he has done with me, but he hasn't. I'll beggar him. I've got ways to do it. And then when he's beggared he'll come back to me."

"It sounds rather melodramatic," the Duke said reflectively. "You might bring a divorce action against him over that girl. But that wouldn't really damage him much. It doesn't nowadays."

"It would be a way of showing Lady Aldington that Macdonald is carrying on with another girl," she said slowly.

"Yes, that would be pretty damnably cruel," Kintyre commented.

"Cruel!" she exclaimed; "it isn't cruel; it's just simply treating these people as they deserve."

"But wait a minute," the Duke said; "perhaps he isn't really carrying on with the girl. Perhaps she's really only what they call a 'sitter.' Perhaps Emily and he have arranged it only so that you should be able to prove adultery against Macdonald. That would set him free. And she could divorce Aldington at any moment. How would that suit you?"

"It wouldn't suit me at all," she said coolly. "And it isn't going to happen. I shall bring a divorce action against him so as to show to the whole world what an abominable, dissolute creature he is. It'll open that woman's eyes to him. And then when I've got the decree I shall never apply to have it made absolute. He'll never be free."

Kintyre exclaimed: "Oh, hang it all, that's a bit too thick!"

"It's what I shall do," she said.

And in his real concern Kintyre exclaimed two or three times: "Oh, hell! Oh, hell!" And then once more he looked straight into her eyes. "You know," he said, "that isn't playing fair. That isn't playing the game. If you have the fun of a divorce action you ought to give him his freedom. No, that isn't fair; you ought to drop that. You'll have to be made to drop that."

"Who can make me?" she said defiantly.

"Oh, hang it all!" Kintyre exclaimed. "You're really alienating all my sympathies. You may take it from me that I have an immense admiration for you—as immense as you could want. But Macdonald is a good chap, and I'll tell you plainly that I should do the best I can to save him from you. I shall do the very best I can. I shan't stick at anything."

His hard, challenging eyes looked straight into hers, and

hers, hard, challenging, and greenish, looked back at him with the sudden glare of the eyes of one of the great cats.

"Yes, an immense admiration!" he said. "But, all the same, I should do all I can to save him. I don't understand what it is you want with him. You don't care for him. You can't care for him. He's too soft! You can't respect a man who's as loveable as he is. And you can't care for a man you don't respect."

"Who says I don't care for him?" she said. "I want him back. I'll ruin him if he doesn't come back."

"Ah, but only because he is a bit of your property that you don't like losing. I tell you I shall do my best to save him."

"Nothing can save him," she said. Her voice was rather faint and her hands trembled.

"Ah, well, we'll see," Kintyre said. "There are ways and means you haven't thought of. I don't believe he cares for you. I don't believe you care for him. I dare say he cares for Emily. And I dare say Emily cares for him. They're awfully made for each other. Why don't you give them a chance?"

She pulled both her hands fiercely from his and flattened her back against the door.

"Never!" she exclaimed. "Not for anything! Not for anybody! You've been talking of the sort of man Sergius Mihailovitch is! Well, let me tell you one thing. He's the sort of man nothing can save. He's the sort of man that is doomed from his birth."

"Oh, that's just talk," Kintyre said. "We weren't really talking about that. We were really talking about something quite different. We were talking about the means I shall have to adopt to save him."

Again she looked at him with the hard, straight glance. "I don't understand you," she said in a low voice; and again he looked at her in return.

"Oh yes, you do," he said slowly. He took his hat and his stick from the oak chest. "I shall come again," he said slowly. "I shall come back and back again until you change your mind."

"Nothing will make me change my mind," she said. "This afternoon I am going to file my petition, and Lady Aldington's name will be in it."

"Although you know perfectly well that she wasn't the woman."

"I know that," she answered, "but it will discredit her enough just having to fight the petition. It will show the world the sort of person she is."

"It will show the world," Kintyre answered, "that she is a little spotless, white angel, and that you're a terrific, gorgeous, flaunting fiend."

"How do you know," she asked, "that that isn't what I want to have shown?"

"Ah," he answered; "but why ~~show it to~~ everybody? Why not just keep it for you and me—for when I come back again?"

She didn't answer, but she slowly put her hand on the door to open it for him.

He had got as far as the hall when it occurred to him that there was something that he still wanted to know. And he came back to ask:

"Now, about ruining Macdonald! How do you think you're going to get him out of the job he's got in the motor shop?"

"My dear man," she answered, "I don't believe he's got any job in the motor shop. I believe that's just a pretext. He just wants those rooms."

The Duke said: "The deuce he does."

"He just wants them," the lady continued, "in order to continue his dissolute practices."

"Oh, is that all?" the Duke said. And then he put

the question that he really wanted to have answered. "But really," he said at first, "Macdonald must have *some* sort of resources. He can't exist on nothing. Don't you suppose he's got some sort of political mission—say, from the Russian Government?"

"He!" the lady ejaculated, with a high contempt. "Who do you suppose would trust him? He's too entirely weak and feeble. No, he's just nothing, and he's just got nothing to do. If he tells you that he has any political errand, don't you believe him. He's just lying so as to make himself of importance in your Smart Set."

The Duke heaved a slight sigh; really, it was a relief, for he couldn't doubt that the Countess was entirely sincere. She knew nothing about the counter-revolution in Galizia. So he said, in order to turn the lady's mind away from the subject:

"Oh, I wouldn't believe that too implicitly, you know. The Smart Set, if there is such a thing, though I never meet it, wouldn't set any particular store by diplomatic importance. They'd be, you know—what is it you call them?—too idle and dissolute. They'd be like me, you know. I wouldn't walk round a lamp-post to meet the most important diplomatist in the world."

"The only diplomatic occupation Sergius Mihailovitch would ever get would be just to secure a new mistress for the Grand Duke. That's about all he is fit for. I tell you he's an idle and useless adventurer. And he's utterly penniless. Don't I know the man? I tell you you'd better look after your pockets if you come into contact with Sergius Mihailovitch. Why, I've known him go three days without food, and have only one suit, and yet turn up looking smart at some Countess or other's garden party. He's utterly impracticable. Why, he'd give his last penny to some needy hanger-on, and never think where the next is coming from!"

"I see," Kintyre said, and nodding pleasantly, he went down the front steps. He occupied his long drive home in the hansom with a brown study. He pushed his hat back on his head and sat looking at the withers of the horse in front of him.

Decidedly he was going to do something for his cousin Emily. But the point was, how far would he have to entangle himself? It was a very complicated position, and if the Countess Macdonald was too savage a woman to be really dangerous, she might nevertheless wound him in some way or other. He didn't see any objection to his cousin's being in a divorce case. It was quite a proper sort of thing if she cared for the man. It would be a quarter of a million times better than her being tired out by her flannel-shirted friends. It would probably shake them all off, for they would be mostly Nonconformists.

"But, hang it all," he suddenly ejaculated, "I wouldn't *marry* that woman! That would be a little too thick even for Emily's sake."

V

IN his bedroom at Claridge's Mr. Dexter was trying the effect of slightly shortening his grey side-whiskers. In his walks in the parks and public places of England he had observed that, however much he might himself resemble idealised pictures of John Bull, he hadn't seen any man of position who resembled himself in that particular. Moreover, he had gone that afternoon to call on Mrs. Gould, whom he had met on the Riviera ; the servant who had opened the door had tentatively suggested that Mr. Dexter ought to have gone down the area steps. And Mr. Dexter, who was not without perception in these matters, had worked it out that Mrs. Gould's servant had taken him for a butler. This had almost decided him that his whiskers must go. And, in his shirt-sleeves, with a safety razor in his hand he was carefully regarding himself in his bedroom glass.

It gave him, therefore, something of a start when his daughter, running in, exclaimed :

" Oh, Popper, I've seen a real live English Duke." And she subsided, exhausted, on to Mr. Dexter's bed.

Mr. Dexter put on his dressing-gown out of respect for his daughter's femininity. He sank himself into an arm-chair and crossed his legs in an attitude that he knew to be genuinely British. A kind smile went over his face, but because he had been thinking very deeply of his personal appearance, his smile was extremely distracted. And this

gave his daughter the idea that he had been thinking about high financial problems.

Then he said : " What Duke ? "

And when his Mamie answered that it was the Duke of Kintyre, he rose slowly from his armchair, went slowly into the sitting-room and slowly returned, carrying a fat red volume that had the Order of the Garter embossed upon its cover. He read out slowly from this volume, " Kintyre. Ninth Duke of (cr. 1642), Sir Edward William Percy Archibald Fitzroy John Augustus . . ." His voice continued for quite a long time droning out a string of titles that meant nothing but rather agreeable sounds to the girl. And then he said : " He doesn't appear to be married. Where did you meet him ? "

" At Countess Macdonald's," Miss Dexter answered. " It was most perfectly thrilling. I tell you, Popper, it was just the home life of the corrupt British aristocracy as you see it on the stage. His cousin is in love with Count Macdonald, and Count Macdonald is in love with his cousin. And the Duke came down to save the family name from ruin. And then I could see the Duke was falling in love with the Countess and the Countess with the Duke. But she won't divorce them. And she is going to reclaim the Count from his idle and dissolute ways. And the Duke says I may call him Kintyre after I've known him a fortnight."

Mr. Dexter, who thought very slowly, said : " Well, well ! " once more.

" And the Countess and I," Miss Dexter continued— " I just wish Macdonald wasn't married, for I love him more than any man, and it's just lovely to see how serious he is when he's helping me to buy gloves—but the Countess and I have sworn a mutual oath that we are to redeem him from his vicious practices."

" Redeem who ? " Mr. Dexter asked

"Why, the Count," Miss Dexter answered.

"What are his idle and dissolute practices?" Mr. Dexter asked again.

"I don't know," Miss Mamie said. "The Countess doesn't explain what they are. But they appear to be dreadful. I know it's awful. I know I oughtn't to; but I can't help saying that it's a tremendous privilege to know such a person. It's as good as knowing Lord Byron or Don Juan."

"But I want to know some more of this," Mr. Dexter said.

"I am telling you as fast as I can," she answered. "It's all a tremendous battle between right and wrong. Of course, I don't believe Count Macdonald ever did anything wrong in his life. But what we've got to do is to redeem him and to make him lead the Simple Life again, and to be strenuous, as the Countess says he used to be when he was under her influence. The Countess is a Socialist, you know."

Mr. Dexter said: "Oh, I think I've sized the Countess up."

"What the Countess wants," Miss Dexter said, "is that the Count should come back to Putney and do without servants, and wear a sack-cloth apron to keep his trousers from getting spoiled when he does the washing-up. The Countess has got a butler now, the most lovely butler you ever saw in your life!"

Mr. Dexter winced slightly, and then he asked: "What does she want a butler for?"

"That's to show the world that she isn't in fault," Miss Dexter answered. "She wants everyone to think that she gives Macdonald the kind of home he wants because she's so gentle and yielding. The Count wants the Smart Set, and the Smart Set always have butlers. So the Countess is going to live like the Smart Set. The Count allows her

two thousand a year, and she says she can do it on that. She says it's all he's got."

"All this appears to be rather confusing," Mr. Dexter said. "But just go on talking. I'm sizing it all up."

"The Duke," Miss Dexter continued, "is Count Macdonald's best friend. He's going to protect Count Macdonald against the Countess. The Countess is going to ruin the Count. But the Duke's going to stop it. But it is all a little confusing, and sometimes I think the Countess contradicts herself, because at one time she talks of leading the Simple Life, and at another she says she's going to go on the stage as a great tragic actress and be the Smart Set herself."

"Well, that's all right," Mr. Dexter said. "I tell you I've sized the Countess up."

"And I don't see," Miss Dexter went on, "how the Duke is going to save the Count if he's going to be in love with the Countess! I could see it in his eyes that he was. He's a perfectly lovely Duke—dark, and like a Spanish don. But I don't see how he's going to fix up saving the Count and loving the Countess at the same time."

"Oh, that's all right," Mr. Dexter said, "that's all right, Mamie. It's like cat's cradle. When you take the string off one set of hands on to another the pattern's all different, but it's the same old string. Now, hold your little tongue, Mamie, and I'll do my thinking."

Mr. Dexter got slowly up from his armchair and, with his dressing-gown enfolding him, he went slowly into his sitting-room again. He returned with an immense cigar.

For a long time Mr. Dexter remained sunk in his armchair. His lips moved on the end of his cigar with an unctuous, sucking sound. And gradually, as he thought his American thoughts, his attitude became less and less British until, his legs stretching out and his heels resting on the washing-stand, his feet were somewhat higher than

his head. From time to time Miss Mamie, sitting on the bed, entertained him with bursts of speech. She recounted the methods of living of the Countess, or the virtues and charms of Sergius Mihailovitch. But Mr. Dexter did no more than from time to time to let drop an ejaculation that was invariably : " Well, now ! "

In spite of his British tastes, his Viennese home, and his American upbringing, Mr. Dexter was of simple, pious German ancestry. His father, Hermann Dexter of Bremen, had made a large fortune by speculating in Californian land at the time of the boom. And Mr. Dexter had, by his quiet, financial methods, added reasonably to this fortune. But, in spite of his sermons on ethics, Mr. Dexter had practically no moral standards and no knowledge of life. His sermons on ethics he indulged in only on dress occasions, and these sermons were no more than quotations from the fervid rhetoric of such American magazines and newspapers as supported the great American trusts. Mr. Dexter believed in keeping one's account scrupulously straight ; in paying one's bills with scrupulous accuracy. He had a certain shrewd knowledge of character, but that was all there was to him. And the main point that he gathered from his daughter's story was that Macdonald hadn't got any money. And one of the main principles of the business tradition that he had inherited from his father had been, never to do business with a man who you knew hadn't got any money. It can't be said, too, that he wasn't affected by his daughter's account of the circle in which Macdonald appeared to live. He was accustomed to think of all foreign aristocrats as being exceedingly immoral—it didn't matter whether they were French, German, Austrian, or Russian. And Mr. Dexter in one way and another had come into contact on the continent with quite a number of counts and barons, nearly all of them exceedingly shady persons. So that his idea of all

aristocrats was that of a crowd of hungry pike all waiting to tear into shreds the fortunes of simple, honest, American citizens.

He did not have to think in this way of any friends of Macdonald's that he had met or heard of. He didn't indeed know that he had met either Kintyre or Lady Aldington, though he had been with them in Countess Macdonald's garden for at least ten minutes during their call. But he had been so engaged in lecturing the young King on the moral and economic advantages of the Trust system that he had not even heard their names. He had negligently omitted to look at them, taking them for the parson and his wife making an afternoon call. But still, he knew that Macdonald was acquainted with this brace of aristocrats, and he heard from his daughter that the intimacy appeared to be a very close one. And he knew that Lady Aldington was enormously wealthy, even by American standards, and that the Duke of Kintyre, though he was poorish for an English duke, could not by any means be called a poor man. So that Mr. Dexter did not need to think of any of Macdonald's friends as penniless adventurers—except perhaps the Marquis da Pinta, who appeared to be negligible, or Mr. Pett, whom Mr. Dexter could not quite make out.

He knew, of course, from reading American books and papers, that the British aristocracy is corrupt. And, in setting out to better himself socially, Mr. Dexter had vaguely taken into account the fact that he and his family would have to come into contact with persons whose manners and customs were not exactly respectable, according to the notions of Boston, Mass. Mr. Dexter, however, was not from Boston, Mass., but from Brooklyn, N.Y., where the standards are slightly different. And quite an astonishing number of Mr. Dexter's business friends had availed themselves of the divorce facilities of the United States. Indeed, when Mr. Dexter came to think of it he

was not acquainted with any single American man of business who hadn't been divorced at least once. Nevertheless, these divorces did not somehow seem to count. They seemed to be airy nothings ; there did not seem to be any sexual passion behind them, so that they had none of the aspects of immorality. But when it came to the large collection of divorce suits into which apparently Macdonald and his friends were going to be plunged, Mr. Dexter couldn't help feeling alarmed for his daughter. There seemed to be so much passion about them. And though Mr. Dexter had quite expected to find corruption amongst the corrupt aristocracy, he hadn't wanted to go quite as far as this. He had hoped to be able to come across at least one or two respectable noblemen and ladies of title with whom he might establish intimacies.

And for the moment Mr. Dexter was really alarmed for his Mamie. American parents have not the same standards as European ones, and it would never have occurred to Mr. Dexter that the pure thoughts of his Mamie would be endangered by this society. It didn't really even occur to him to think that it might be bad for the girl, who was obviously sickly in love with Sergius Mihailovitch, to establish an intimacy with the Countess Macdonald. Nor did he anticipate any danger to the girl's morals from Macdonald himself, nor yet for her reputation or her social position. Into Mr. Dexter's American mind these considerations never entered. He was afraid, nevertheless ; he was genuinely and seriously worried. He wished that he could have consulted Mrs. Dexter, but Mrs. Dexter had taken the opportunity to visit her relatives in Saratoga Springs. But what he was afraid of for himself was Macdonald's pennilessness. And what he was afraid of for his daughter was the Countess's physical violence.

If he had had to regard Macdonald as a prospective son-in-law the pennilessness would not have worried him. Mr.

Dexter was quite wealthy enough to set up a household for any European, young, noble pair. And if it had been in the United States, Mr. Dexter would have been quite prepared to purchase Macdonald for his daughter from the Countess. But this matter was complicated by Lady Aldington. Mr. Dexter didn't imagine that Lady Aldington would be a seller. She was too immensely wealthy. She was extraordinarily, she was quite respectably wealthy. Mr. Dexter had even heard his own chief, Hodges P. Mordaunt, speak of Lady Aldington along with himself as being one of the possible chief forces of the world. So that he wouldn't be able to buy Macdonald of *her* for his daughter. But he imagined that he had sized up the Countess Macdonald, and he was really afraid. He was afraid simply that if it came to a three-cornered scene between the Countess, Lady Aldington, and his daughter, his daughter might suffer physically. He was afraid, in fact, that the Countess would throw vitriol over his Mamie.

So, he sat and meditated. At about a quarter to eight he roused himself from his armchair and went into his sitting-room. He telephoned down to the hotel office to ask them to ring up Mr. Hodges P. Mordaunt at the Hotel Bristol in Paris. He said that he would stop in his room all the evening so that Mr. Mordaunt might get through, and would they tell Mr. Mordaunt that it was urgent ?

Miss Dexter heard the conversation from the bedroom, and she came running in, to exclaim :

" Oh, Popper, and you promised to go with me to the New Philharmonic concert this evening ! "

Mr. Dexter said that he was very sorry. It couldn't be helped. He had a meeting of Mr. Mordaunt's interest at eleven next morning, and he must speak to him that night. He suggested that his daughter should go to the concert alone.

Without waiting for him to finish his sentence, Miss

Dexter said : " Oh, Popper, I guess I'll ask the Count to take me." And before Mr. Dexter had put the telephone down, she had it in her hand and was giving Macdonald's number to the hotel office. She knew the number by heart, and she knew that the telephone was set up just outside Macdonald's bedroom. And Mr. Dexter heard her exclaim :

" That Count Macdonald ? " And then : " Say, Count, I want you to take me to the New Philharmonic ! " and then : " Oh, that's real mean ! Who are you dressing for ? Lady Aldington ? "

The girl's face, with the receiver of the instrument to her ear, became intensely dejected. Immediately afterwards she said :

" What ? what ? " and she became radiant little by little. " What ? I can come too ? Yes, I can rush into my glad rags like a hurricane. What's the address ? Leicester House ? Yes, yes, yes ! "

She hung up the telephone and regarded her father with triumph.

" Oh, Popper ! " she exclaimed, " he's going to let me go to Lady Aldington's. She's got a great party, and all the Liberal speakers. He says it's going to be dull for me, but I guess it won't. He's going to meet me there."

Mr. Dexter surveyed his daughter kindly for a minute. " I guess," he said, " if you take my advice, you'd pull up your stakes in that direction."

" Oh, you silly old Popper ! Why ? " she exclaimed.

" Oh, say the feller's pretty penniless," Mr. Dexter said. " That will do for a reason. And I'll advise you to quit."

She moved towards the door. " I guess I won't quit," she said. " I guess you're a real silly old Popper to go and get ratty over the first gentleman I ever really cared for. I guess you're just ugly with jealousy."

Mr. Dexter smiled. " Well, he is pretty penniless," he said. " You told me so yourself."

"You're really a silly, mercenary old man," she answered. "And if he is pretty penniless, what does it matter? He isn't going to need to support me in luxury. I'm going to help win him back to the Countess and the Simple Life, when he won't have to have any hired help. But he'll have to wear a sack-cloth apron to keep his perfectly elegant trousers clean when he does the washing-up."

"Well, you can do as you like," Mr. Dextèr said.

"I guess I'm going to," she answered. And, having kissed him on the forehead, she ran out of the room.

She did not see much of Macdonald that evening and she heard hardly anything at all of the speeches. Instead, she sat on a great landing of the great house between two of the huge porphyry columns that supported the distant ceiling. She sat with the Duke of Kintyre beside her, on two hard mahogany hall seats facing a white marble Bacchus. The voice of Dr. Farquhar reverberated from the distance; the steps were all of white stone. Mamie had never imagined anything so gloomy until she had been to the British Museum. And this seemed to her to be gloomier than the British Museum, except that the footmen wore red velvet breeches. And Mamie had to listen to a really frightful scolding from the Duke. It wasn't that he spoke angrily, but she hadn't ever been spoken so seriously to in her life. He seemed to forget that she was a woman, and just talked on without raising or lowering his voice, as if she had tried to murder the Count. He seemed, she didn't know how, to have wormed out of her that she had been telling her father things, and that, although she thought nothing at all of the Count's being penniless, her silly old father had made a great deal of it. And the Duke had really been most rude to her. He had said that she had violated sacred confidences in repeating to anyone a word that she had heard at Count Macdonald's house. And when she

said that Countess Macdonald had told her to tell the whole world everything, the Duke answered that it was plain that the Countess was mad with wickedness, and that, for all he knew, she had ruined Macdonald for ever.

Miss Dexter burst into passionate tears. She told the Duke that he was a wicked man, that she adored the Count, and that sooner than do him an injury she would have thrown herself off the top of the Monument, where they had the rails round to stop people committing suicide. She said that to get a smile from the Count she would go on her knees on the stones and stop there for a week.

But this did not in the least move His Grace. He sat looking at her with serious eyes in the gloom, and he told her, with extraordinary solemnness, that if she ever breathed a single word to anyone outside Macdonald's household of what she heard within it, or if she ever breathed a word to the Countess of what she heard about Macdonald's interests outside, he, Kintyre, would forbid Macdonald ever to speak another word to her.

Shaken almost out of her soul, the girl really fainted. Kintyre had her carried downstairs into the library. But even when she came to he wouldn't let her be seen home by Macdonald, and he didn't even see her home himself. He said that he would have to talk seriously to Sergius Mihailovitch that night, in order to see if they could not repair some of the mischief she had done. And he had her sent home in Lady Aldington's carriage under the guardianship of a disagreeable old lady called Mrs. Crewkerne, who was her ladyship's aunt, and who was not in the least sympathetic.

She cried all night ; she did not feel fit to see her father next morning. And as soon as she could move she had herself motored down to Putney to see if Sergius Mihailovitch were not there. And when she got there she wanted to be back at the hotel to see if Macdonald were not with

her father, for she understood from the Duke that those two had business relations. In order to excuse her leaving Putney, she insisted on taking the Countess with her. She said she wanted the lady to make her father's acquaintance, and, as the Countess wanted to go into town to see her solicitors, she made no objection to being motored as far as Claridge's.

VI

MR. DEXTER spent an exceedingly worried night, for it was not until nine o'clock in the morning that his ears were gladdened by the sound of the authoritative and drawling voice of the great Mr. Mordaunt on the telephone. Mr. Mordaunt having supped out, had not returned to his hotel in Paris until eight o'clock, and then he had taken a bath and had otherwise refreshed himself before attending to Mr. Dexter's call.

In his sitting-room Mr. Dexter heard Mr. Mordaunt say :
" Hello ! That you, Dexter ? What's the racket ? "

Mr. Dexter replied : " It's about this Galizian business. Their syndicate meets here at ten. I want to pull out of it."

He heard the voice of the great man say :

" Golly, why somever ? Lost your nerve ? "

" I don't believe they've got any money behind them," Mr. Dexter replied.

Mr. Mordaunt's voice came quick and decidedly : " We never thought they had, did we ? But they've got the concession, haven't they ? "

" They've got that," Mr. Dexter said ; " but they're a pretty shady crew. There is only this Macdonald and some sort of a journalist and a Galizian marquis of sorts."

" Well, I know all about that," Mr. Mordaunt said.
" Supposing they do cabbage a little of the dollars ?

There's plenty. We've got to allow for wastage. I want that concession."

"But see here!" Mr. Dexter pleaded. "Why not drop these royalties altogether, and get the concession from the Republican Government?"

The voice of Mr. Mordaunt said reflectively: "I've thought of that. On the face of it, it seems a pretty good scheme. But it isn't. It's too expensive. You take my advice, Dexter. Never you have to do with a republican ministry when you can have to do with a king. A king has got to be paid, but he's an infant in the boodle line when it comes to a republican ministry, simply because he isn't a professional politician. He hasn't got the genius of extortion. And, mind you, there are thirty-two ministers in Galizia, and every one of them will have to have his whack. Besides, someone else will stick the King on his throne in six months' time if we don't, and then bang goes our concession. No, it's not good enough. Have another try, Sammy Dexter."

"But, Mr. Mordaunt," Mr. Dexter pleaded, "I've got family reasons for wanting to clear out."

"I guessed you had something of the sort, Sammy," the great man's voice said. "But this is business, not family talk. Supposing we give this particular lot the go-by? What then?"

"Why shouldn't we," Mr. Dexter said rather humbly, "just go to the King and get a new concession for ourselves?"

Mr. Mordaunt's voice remained silent for so long that Mr. Dexter at the last said:

"Hallo!"

And Mr. Mordaunt answered: "Stand easy! I'm just thinking."

Quite a few minutes afterwards he said: "Now, listen to me! I don't want to lose this concession. *I don't*

want to! Understand that! Now, you don't know, but I do, that we aren't the only pebbles on the beach. There's been someone from a Russian direction, and there's an English Duke—Kin—Ken—Kintyre, that's the name; and there is that lady I was talking about—Lady Aldington. She's already in possession of a part of the field. Now see here, Dexter! I don't want to have to *fight* those interests. I want to stand in with them. Understand that! I don't want to have a war on my hands at the very beginning."

Mr. Mordaunt's voice was rather heavy and threatening, and Mr. Dexter had for Mr. Mordaunt all the respect that an ordinary courtier has for an extraordinary monarch. He considered that Mr. Mordaunt could ruin him at any moment as easily as he could eat a banana. Mr. Mordaunt had only got to say to any stock market in the world: "Mark that stock up, and that stock down," and the bottom would fall out of Mr. Dexter. Besides, it wasn't only fear. Mr. Dexter had for Mr. Mordaunt an extraordinary reverence; for him he was The Chief. He was more than a king; he was almost more than the Pope, though Mr. Dexter was a good Catholic, for Mr. Mordaunt was the richest man in the world. And he was an astonishing man. There was not a single thing he didn't know and didn't carry around in his head. How, for instance, had Mr. Mordaunt come to hear that the Duke of Kintyre had been buying ground in Galizia? Mr. Dexter had never heard it. With a great deal of humility he asked:

"What do you want me to do, sir?"

"See here!" he got a question back. "Do you gather that that man Kintyre and that woman are in with that little syndicate? What it amounts to is this: if they aren't, you can give the syndicate the go-by this morning; but if they're in it for just one single cent, and if the syndicate hasn't got a trouser button for capital, you've just got to sign anything that syndicate wants. Understand that!

You find out if they're in it, and then do as I've said. If they aren't, we'll buy up the old Queen-Mother for ourselves."

And before Mr. Dexter could make any remark, Mr. Mordaunt said :

" You keep this line open here while the meeting is on, and if you want to ask me any questions, I'm at the end of it. But I guess I want to eat my breakfast now."

And at the same moment there came a knock at the door. There entered, behind the hotel page, Mr. and Mrs. Pett. And before Mr. Dexter had done shaking hands, there were the Marquis da Pinta and the young King. Then there was Macdonald. Mr. Dexter was a little worried by their singular punctuality. The clock was just striking ten. Mr. Dexter's sitting-room was a long, rather low room for London. It contained more saddle-bag chairs than is usual in an hotel. And with an eye to effect, Mr. Dexter had arranged a table in front of the fireplace. Behind the table there were two chairs. In one of those Mr. Dexter proposed to sit, with the King at his right hand. Above the mantelpiece hung a huge, shiny map of the republic of Galizia. This Mr. Dexter had purchased from an educational bookseller. . . . They were all talking about the weather, which was rather cold for September. Mr. Dexter, however, piloted the King to the armchair behind the table. He stood beside him, and then he remarked to Macdonald :

" I guess the whole syndicate is here, Count."

Macdonald answered : " Oh, just wait a minute, Mr. Dexter."

And just then there came into the room a tall, dark, rather melancholy-looking gentleman and a fair lady. Macdonald introduced them as Mrs. Fawkner and Mr. Archibald. Mr. Dexter seemed to know their faces, but he couldn't remember where he had met them. He had

to delay the opening of the meeting a few minutes whilst he had two more saddle-bag chairs brought in. When he turned his back from the door he discovered that Mr. Pett had sat himself down in the chair beside the King at the table. He had a great many papers before him. And he appeared arrogant and very cheerful.

"I think I'll take the chairmanship of this meeting," he said. "I know most about the details."

And Mr. Dexter found himself forced to sit next to Mrs. Pett at the end of the room. He felt very unhappy. Mr. Pett, who really had taken the chair at many public meetings, whirled things along in an admirable manner.

"I take it," he said, "that there is no need for me to read the constitution of the new kingdom. You've all read it. I'll get on at once to the agreement between the syndicate and Mr. Dexter. What we have to consider is that this is not a commercial syndicate. None of us want to make any money out of it ; what we want is to establish a kingdom on a satisfactory basis for the inhabitants. We have to consider that Mr. Dexter represents what in America is called a trust, and what in Europe is known as a monopoly. Trusts may be beneficent or they may be an affliction to a country, according to its laws. In the United States trusts are a curse. We have to consider how we may prevent the trust which Mr. Dexter represents from being a curse to Galizia. This is what I have endeavoured to do in the deed I have drawn up. It provides that the operations shall be strictly confined to the district of Gallegos ; it provides that there shall be no inter-district trading ; it provides that the offices of the company shall be in the city of Flores, and so on. If it's your pleasure, I will read the document and we can discuss clause by clause."

Mr. Dexter had really lost his temper ; he had had a very bad night ; he had had no breakfast, and Mr.

Mordaunt had thoroughly frightened him. He said in rather a harsh voice :

" Before we go into that I want to know what money you've got. I want to know whether you are substantial people. I don't mind saying that I've heard you're not."

Mr. Pett exclaimed : " Good God ! I haven't got any money. I'm not putting money into it. I'm putting brains. I'm a writer on economics."

Mr. Dexter said : " Ah ! "

And then he turned upon the Marquis da Pinta : " You haven't got any money to put into it ? "

Da Pinta looked blankly foreign. " Money ? " he said. " No ; no money, but estates—great estates."

Again Mr. Dexter said : " Ah ! "

And he looked at Macdonald. " I understand," he said, " that you don't propose to put any money into it, either. I understand that you're not what they call a substantial man. You also are going to put only brains into it."

He looked also with a rapid negligence at the dark gentleman and the fair lady.

" I suppose with you too," he said, " it's only a case of brains ? "

Mr. Dexter thought he was upon safe ground there, for he had never heard the names of either Fawkner or Archibald in connection with money.

" Well, then," he continued, " it doesn't seem to me that this meeting represents dollars enough to sit here and criticise either the laws of the United States or the syndicate that I represent."

The tall dark man was lying rather lackadaisically sideways in his deep chair. He put his hand negligently into a side pocket of his blue pilot coat. He drew out a very white letter, which he held towards Mr. Dexter.

" If you read this," he said rather insolently, " you will understand better what you're talking about."

And Mr. Dexter had to cross the floor in order to take the letter.

"What's this? What's this?" he muttered.

His eyes were met by the name of a great joint stock bank. And then he read below it the words :

"DEAR SIR,

"With reference to your inquiry of this morning we have to inform you that His Excellency Count Macdonald has standing to his credit at this moment in our hands the sum of sixty thousand pounds, and that we consider that he is a gentleman with whom you can quite safely enter upon such a transaction as the one you mention."

Mr. Dexter heaved a deep sigh and stood looking at the document.

The dark gentleman said to him : " You see, I was more cautious than you. Before undertaking business relations with Count Macdonald I took the precaution to inquire at his bank what his financial position might be." And the dark gentleman looked at Mr. Dexter with rather an insolent expression. " I wouldn't listen to gossip again if I were you," he said, " wherever it comes from. You risk having us throw you out of this affair altogether. We can do perfectly well without you."

For a moment or two Mr. Dexter was not conscious of anything. The matters were too much to take in all at once. He hardly knew what he was doing ; he didn't grasp what he heard. He heard behind him a metallic, buzzing sound, and his brain sent to him mechanically that some one was speaking from the other end of the telephone wire, whose receiver was off. Then he heard the voice of Mr. Pett saying :

" Yes, yes. That's so." And in the same subconscious

way he recognised that Mr. Pett must be speaking into the telephone that was on the table behind his back, for Mr. Pett's voice was hard, raised, and distinct. Then he heard Mr. Pett say :

" Yes, they are both here . . . in this room." And then once more :

" Yes, they are both in it, heart and soul. You can bet they're going to see it through."

And then Mr. Dexter heard Mr. Pett's voice speaking to him in the ordinary conversational tones. Mr. Pett said :

" Mr. Dexter, there's some chap at the end of this telephone who says you're to sign any damn thing we please as long as he gets the concession."

Mr. Dexter turned sharply round. Mr. Pett was hanging up the receiver on its hook.

" My God ! " Mr. Dexter exclaimed, " you've been speaking to Hodges P. Mordaunt, and you've rung him off ! "

Mr. Pett said : " Oh, that was Hodges P. Mordaunt, was it ? And he is behind you, is he ? I am glad I know."

Mr. Dexter snatched fiercely at the telephone. He called down to the office that they were to ring Mr. Mordaunt in Paris at once again. He said that they had been cut off by mistake ; and when the central office told him that it would probably take him a couple of hours to get on to Paris again, Mr. Dexter groaned aloud. He wanted to speak to Mr. Mordaunt as desperately as a child when it is in the dark wants to speak to a grown-up person. He really didn't know where he was. He was extraordinarily nervous. The people he was among were not like any American business people he had ever been used to. For he was used to gentlemen who paid him profuse compliments for two hours and a half over a lunch table, and then tried to slip in a business deal whilst they were getting

their hats and sticks in the cloak room. These people weren't business people. They hadn't paid him any compliments at all. They had treated him quite insolently, and they had got to business with a directness that struck Mr. Dexter as being nothing more or less than brutally unusual. But they seemed to be inclined to allow him time to think. He had gone back to his armchair and was sitting sunk in it, with his legs stretched out before him. And the only thing that occurred to him to say was :

"Well, yes, Hodges P. Mordaunt is behind me."

He expected that they would at least show some signs of astonished respect. But they didn't any of them seem to take any more stock of Hodges P. Mordaunt than if he had been just an ordinary banker. And he could not afford to let things go as easily as all that. He looked at the gentleman called Mr. Archibald and coughed.

"You'll understand," he said, "that having to represent the interests of Mr. Mordaunt it was my duty to make some inquiry as to our friend the Count's position."

"I should have thought," Mr. Archibald replied, "that you would have done that at the start, and not left it so late that it appears like an insult to all of us."

"An insult!" Mr. Dexter exclaimed. "There's nothing like an insult meant. We are here all of us to-day to put our cards upon the table. The point is to determine what we are all ready to do in this undertaking that we all have at heart."

"That sounds all right," Mr. Pett said.

And suddenly from beside him the young King brought out the words :

"If any one is beginning to insult my friend Macdonald, I vote that that person be ejected from this room. My friend Macdonald is a thundering good sort."

"Oh, it's all right, Mr. Spenlow," Macdonald said soothingly. "Nobody is insulting me."

Mr. Dexter appealed to Macdonald. "Now, why do you call His Majesty Mr. Spenlow?" he said.

Mr. Pett suddenly cut in: "That's my idea, that is. What you don't seem to understand is that we want a certain amount of secrecy about this affair. So I've insisted that any one who is at all likely to be connected in the public mind with the kingdom we are concerned in shall be addressed by a name that isn't his."

"That seems very sensible," Mr. Dexter said.

"So," Mr. Pett continued, "as nobody would connect you with the great ones of the earth, you can continue to be Mr. Dexter and I can go on being myself for the same reason. You and I are of humble birth and don't count. But the Marquis da Pinta has got to be Mr. Rosenbaum. He looks like a Jew, so we can remember that, and as he hardly ever speaks it doesn't much matter. And Macdonald is going to be Mr. Mack, because we all call him Mac, and that makes it easy. The King is Mr. Spenlow, and that is Mr. Archibald, and that is Lady—I mean Mrs. Fawkner. Now you know all about it, and we can get on."

"I wish we could get on," the King said. "I want to be out of this. I want to be at Brooklands by twelve."

"Oh, we are making very good progress, Mr. Spenlow," Mr. Pett said. "Now then, Mr. Dexter, for all our cards are on the table! . . . First, there is me. I'm the brains of the show. Then there's Mr. Spenlow and Mr. Rosenbaum there. They provide the raw material of the concession we're going to work. Then there is Mack there. He does the organising and the picturesque side of the job—the battleships and so on. Mr. Rosenbaum also sees to the bribing of the population that we've got to bribe. Then there's Mr. Archibald—you can take my word for it that he's a substantial gentleman. And there's Mrs. Fawkner; she is substantial too. They're here to see whether the cards you lay on the table are good enough to

let them want to take a hand in the game. Now, then, what are your cards? You're down for eight million pounds sterling—forty million dollars—and your chief says you're to sign any damn thing we put before you. Is that so?"

Mr. Dexter coughed faintly: "As I have Mr. Mor-daunt's instructions," he said, "I am only to enter this enterprise if it has the backing of a certain lady and a certain nobleman."

"Well, that's all right," Mr. Archibald said. "You've got me and Mrs. Fawkner."

Mr. Dexter gave a smile which was meant to show a polite and superior patience.

"That may be very well," he said; "but the lady and gentleman I mean are people of extremely high situation and great resources. I mean that the lady is said to be in a position to draw her cheque for a couple of million sterling at two days' notice." He looked at Mrs. Fawkner and smiled. "That you'll understand, madam," he continued, "makes it almost an impossibility! . . ."

He received back a polite look from a pair of eyes that appeared to him to be extraordinarily cold and English. He couldn't remember to have noticed the name of Fawkner in Debrett, though he had studied that volume very carefully. The lady sat quite still, with her gloved hands folded before her. Her sitting forward in her deep chair gave her an aspect of a slight, business-like stiffness. She spoke very precisely.

"I have come prepared," she said, "to pay to the account of Mr. Mack the exact sum that you mention, as soon as I am assured that you are ready to place at his disposal the sum which you are understood to be ready to find."

Mr. Dexter said: "But my dear madam——"

Mrs. Fawkner continued: "And I may as well tell you—I dislike talking about money matters, and I have reflected sufficiently about it—that if you do not feel inclined

to find this money at once, and to leave the whole conduct of the matter in the hands of Mr. Mack, I shall myself do so."

Mr. Dexter exclaimed: "Do what?"

"I shall find the whole of the money for this enterprise."

"But you're not serious?" Mr. Dexter said. "You really can't be in earnest?"

"Do I look," the lady said, "as if I were not in earnest? I have considered the matter quite carefully. I don't mind telling you that I suspected that you were only acting as the agent for Mr. Mordaunt, and I put it to my financial advisers that what is a good-enough speculation for Mr. Mordaunt is a good-enough speculation for me. It is probably better for me, because I already, along with some of my friends, have interests in the direction in which the money is laid out."

Mr. Dexter said: "But pray, pray excuse me for a minute."

He felt a desperate desire to get into his bedroom, the door of which stood ajar just at his right hand. His bedroom seemed to him to be a blessed place of refuge since it contained all the British books of reference to noble, landed, or wealthy families. If this Mrs. Fawcner really had at her command a sum of about fifty million dollars, he must certainly be able to trace her.

"Just wait a minute," the lady said, "and then I shall have done speaking. There are these considerations which I may as well put to you. I am quite determined to put this sum at the disposal of Mr. Mack—if it is absolutely necessary. But, of course, I do not wish to disturb to such an extent the capital of myself and various friends. And I quite understand that if in this way I should come against your principals, something like a financial war might ensue. But, as far as I've been informed of the financial methods of your principal, I believe that he has

a strong objection to such conflicts. I don't believe that he will really want to come into conflict with my interests, which, in this particular field, are fairly powerful. That is really all I have to say. And if you wish to consult any friends whom you may have in the next room, I have now nothing against it."

Mr. Dexter exclaimed with the utmost astonishment: "Friends in the next room—I?"

"It would really be much better," the lady said, "to be perfectly open in these matters. You locked the door of this room quite ostentatiously when we all came in. But for the last five minutes I have observed a shadow of one or possibly two persons through the crack of the door in your room. I really don't see any reason for this delicacy on your part. That is all I mean. Your friends may just as well be in this room as in that. I have nothing at all against it."

Mr. Dexter suddenly fell back from the door of his own bedroom, for the door opened of itself.

There came in the Countess Macdonald in an outdoor costume of Oriental furs; she was dragging behind her Miss Dexter.

"My dear Lady Aldington," she said in her high voice, "Mr. Dexter is entirely innocent. We found the door of this room locked, and as Miss Dexter was anxious to introduce me to her father, I suggested that she'd better take me through his bedroom. It has a door on the corridor."

"And so you have been listening for the last five minutes," Mr. Archibald said to the lady in Oriental furs.

"My dear Kintyre," the lady said, "of course I've been listening. It was my business to listen."

And in the momentary silence that ensued, each of the syndicate was perfectly aware that everyone else of the syndicate was trying to remember what they had said in the last five minutes.

Mr. Pett cheerfully broke the silence: "Oh, that's all right, Countess Mac," he said; "there is no reason why you shouldn't hear. I hope you won't let it out, though, and spoil the show."

"I shall make exactly what use of the information I please," the Countess said.

"Oh, please don't do that," Mr. Pett said. "You'll upset all our prima donnas and tenors all over the world. It's no end of a ticklish job getting together a gigantic opera trust like this."

Kintyre had been looking with a serious glance at Miss Dexter, and behind the Countess's back Miss Dexter was silently weeping.

"I couldn't help it," she sobbed; "no, I couldn't help it. Don't you look at me like that."

The Duke looked at Countess Macdonald. "My dear woman," he said, "I don't suppose you really want to interfere with a harmless enterprise like ours. I don't know whether you had really gathered what we were up to. But, as Mr. Pett has amiably let the cat out of the bag, we are doing nothing more than getting together a syndicate for the reformation of English opera upon national lines."

"And what," the Countess asked, "has Sergius Mihailovitch got to do with the grand opera? The ballet is much more in his line."

"Oh, of course," the Duke said, "he will have the management of the ballet as well."

"That," the Countess said, "is probably the real attraction for him."

Suddenly Lady Aldington rose from her deep chair.

"I don't see any use in prolonging this meeting," she said. She looked at Mr. Dexter. "You have my terms," she said. "I presume you understand them, and you'll agree when you discuss the matter with your principal."

You can telephone to me at any time you like at Leicester House."

And Lady Aldington walked towards the door. Mr. Dexter almost ran to open it for her. She included the company in a slight inclination of farewell. Kintyre still sat deep in his armchair, as he always did when he had nothing else to do. He drew from his waistcoat pocket a single eyeglass that he fixed unskilfully in his right eye. It was a sort of toy that amused his idle habit of mind. Through it he gazed at the Countess, screwing up his features so that, olive-skinned and dark-bearded, he resembled a Spanish Don trying to imitate the grimaces of a clown. The Countess looked at him sardonically.

"Your cousin did not seem to take much special notice of me," she said.

"She didn't take much notice of anybody, Margaret." The voice of Mrs. Pett suddenly startled them all. "She regarded this as a purely business meeting. You wouldn't think it to look at her, but she is a most extraordinarily cool-headed person when it comes to business. I have seen that. I wanted to know how a great property was really worked. So she took me one morning to her offices—to one of her offices. There wasn't a drawer in the place that she hadn't a rough knowledge of the contents of. And what struck me most was the extraordinary concentration of her manner. She got a sort of grip, a sort of coldness——"

"Well, I experienced some of that," Mr. Dexter said amiably. "I was never spoken to like that in my life."

"She says," Mrs. Pett continued, "that she can afford herself that manner in business things. She says it's the only way she can get through."

The Countess said suddenly: "I think I know all I want to know about Lady Aldington, thank you, Anne."

She looked at the Duke with the manner of a cool slave-owner,

"You'd better come along with me," she said. "I want to speak to you."

The Duke rolled himself sideways out of the seat of his chair and, standing up, stiffened his shoulders obediently. And whilst the Countess swept out of the room—she had not given a single look at Sergius Mihailovitch, but had kept her face as stiffly towards the door as if it had been resting in a photographer's neck stall—Miss Dexter suddenly exclaimed from the bedroom door :

"Oh, I hope I haven't done any harm to Count Macdonald? Oh, I hope I haven't done any harm to Count Macdonald?"

The Duke looked at her with his enigmatic and gloomy eyes.

"God knows! God knows!" he said.

Then he stalked gloomily out of the room after the Countess. Macdonald stood up lightly on his feet. They were all silent, listening to the sobs of Miss Dexter.

"It's extraordinary how little talking I've had to do this morning," he said. "I might have been a battlefield that you were all contending over while I just lay there—except, of course, that it didn't hurt. It's been delightful to be so lazy, and it's all gone like greased clockwork. Her Excellency couldn't have broken the meeting up at a more convenient moment."

He looked at the King. "Come along, Mr. Spenlow," he said, "we'll be down at Brooklands by half-past twelve all right. And I guess if you want to do a kingly action you will ask Miss Dexter and Mrs. Pett to come with us. They haven't either of them seen an aeroplane."

The King suddenly started to life.

"In that way," Macdonald said, "we leave Mr. Pett and Mr. Rosenbaum to explain to Mr. Dexter the terms of the contract Mr. Pett has drawn up. It's all entirely Mr. Pett's doing."

Mr. Pett said : "Oh, rot ! The whole thing was your idea."

The King was making towards the door with more animation than he had displayed at any moment of the meeting, but he was delayed in his stride by the fact that Sergius Mihailovitch had gone into Mr. Dexter's bedroom and found Miss Dexter sitting on the bed and weeping, with her hands hiding her face. He sat down on the bed beside her and patted her shoulder.

"There ! there !" he said. "It's all forgotten ; it's all forgiven. There aren't any bones broken. You'll just have to get used to Kintyre's manners. He's a tremendously great nobleman, and he regards us all just as the grass he treads on with his patent leather shoes."

Miss Dexter pulled her hands fiercely down from her face.

"You're every bit as great a nobleman," she said. "I hate that old Duke ! I never want to speak to him again."

"Now, that's rather awkward," Macdonald said, "because it's perfectly plain that he's the person you ought to marry."

She looked at him more fiercely than ever. "Marry him !" she said. "I'd as soon marry a toad."

"Oh, well, you know," Macdonald said, "he may have a jewel in his forehead."

But the allusion meant nothing to Miss Dexter, who was preparing a new invective against Kintyre when Macdonald held up his forefinger :

"Just a minute !" he said.

From the next room they heard the voice of Mr. Dexter, raised high, and saying, more and more jubilantly :

"Hello, hello ! . . . That Paris ? . . . That the Hotel Bristol ?—that Hodges P. Mordaunt ? . . . That you, sir ? . . ."

"Doesn't it awe you," Macdonald said, "to think that we're connected at this very moment with the greatest force in the world ?"

"Besides,"—Miss Dexter ignored his question and continued her own train of thoughts—"if I married that ugly old Duke you'd never get your divorce, and then you'd never marry Lady Aldington."

Macdonald's smile became for a moment rather vague. But he recovered himself immediately, and said :

"Oh, well, if I've been impertinent to you for your good, you've been impertinent to me in return. So we are quits, and I hope it'll be for my good too. Come along, we're all going to Brooklands, and Mr. Spenlow is in a hurry."

Miss Dexter had jumped from the bed to her father's washstand. She had poured out a basin full of water and had shaken half a bottle of eau de Cologne into it, and had got her face right into the basin before Macdonald was through the door.

In the next room the King was standing forlornly in the middle of the floor. Mrs. Pett was beside him, buttoning up her gloves. Mr. Dexter, the Marquis da Pinta, and Mr. Pett were grouped round the telephone, into which Mr. Pett was reading slowly the terms of the deed that were to limit the powers of the trust in the kingdom of Galizia. Apparently at the other end of the wire Mr. Mordaunt had some difficulty in appreciating the nicenesses of Mr. Pett's London pronunciation, for one sentence Mr. Pett had to repeat three times over, and once he exclaimed with exasperation :

"Oh, hang it all ! Cawn't you understand Henglish ? "

"That," Macdonald remarked cheerfully to the King, "is how Your Majesty makes history."

"It seems to be a silly, rotten sort of a way," was the King's comment.

PART IV

I

THIS was in the beginning of October, but it was nevertheless a full six months before Sergius Mihailovitch and Emily Aldington stood on the deck of the yacht *Esmeralda* looking at the dark outline of the city of Batalha. It was therefore April, and although in north Galizia the spring by that month has as a rule not fully set in, there are at times certain days of great heat and certain nights of a tepid warmth. And this was such a night. The yacht was moored close into the quays, for indeed in that city they have deep waters right to the heart of the bay. There was no moon, but the clusters of bright stars, like swarms of bees, covered the entire dark heavens. Immediately alongside there towered up, black and frowning, the great square masses of warehouses. In front of the warehouses they could make out three enormous steam cranes, like four-legged giants of iron. A little to the left there was an old palace that now housed the Galizian custom service. On its roof against the sky they could see faintly a chariot with three horses and the silhouette of a woman who, standing in the chariot, held out towards them a wreath of laurels. Further along, high standards of electric lights flickered and intermittently sparked and died down for a moment, as if they intended to go out for good ; now and then, brightly lit and glowing, an electric tram ran for a brief space along the water front, to be lost behind white houses almost before the rumble of

its passing reached their ears coming down the water. Further along still there were some lighted cafés, from which there came faintly the sound of guitars and the metallic bray of a phonograph that continued to repeat the air of "*La ci darem la mano.*" Away to the north there rose up the tall shafts of the factory chimneys that they could count to the number of seven, looming indistinctly in the night, though from one of the factories there came a blinding glare and bright white smoke, sending wavering trails of radiance down the dark water. And all around and behind the town they had the sense of high mountains, looming darkly, and of ragged sea cliffs. There ran, moreover, across the sea front of the bay two promontories of land that seemed to overlap, on each promontory being silhouetted the ragged form of a castle, the one being known as Le Morro, and the other the Castle of the Gracious Endeavour.

"So that," Sergius Mihailovitch said suddenly, "this is what we can call success. It's success so overwhelming that if we each of us had a hundred hands and a hundred arms we couldn't take hold of it, and we couldn't grasp what it meant."

The ship seemed all asleep, though somewhere someone watched. A boat was crossing the harbour at a distance and men were singing in it. From the portholes of the upper cabins there was shown here and there a light, bright and yellow, illuminating a little half-circle of the blue darkness. They were on the captain's bridge, looking down over the whole ship.

"And wouldn't you think," Sergius Mihailovitch continued—"Don't you feel a sense of all these people slumbering beneath our feet? Doesn't it make the whole ship seem like an immense, softly breathing organism? Don't you feel little Pett and his wife rather oppressed by the heat where that light is? And don't you feel the little

King on the other side, looking out of his porthole and trying to think historic thoughts, whereas all the while all he can really think about is the new wrench that he and Mr. Salt have been trying to make out of hardened aluminium? And if you really try you can just catch a whiff of the odour of the pope's cigarettes. His room is somewhere just about under our feet. And the crew is all asleep, and the officers are lying on mattresses right forward there. And the captain is talking to my namesake MacDonald, the King of Batalha. You can just hear their voices. And the cooks, and the stewards, and the stewardesses, and the cabin boys—how many people are there on the ship? A hundred! a hundred and twenty! Haven't you got a sense of them all, sleeping or watching?"

"No, I haven't," Lady Aldington answered. "I am not so sensitized. I only feel a sense . . . of you."

"Ah, my dear!" Sergius Mihailovitch said.

And after a silence he continued: "Well, then, don't you feel," he asked, "a sense that it's all more than we deserve? We've got everything that we want. There is nothing we can think of that we haven't got. To-morrow we begin the silly little revolution, and nothing in the world can stop its success. There's nothing that we have not foreseen, and there isn't a helping hand for the other side anywhere in the world. And haven't we just glided along until we are here together—exactly where we want to be, and exactly as we want to be? And we don't seem to have done anything."

Again Lady Aldington said: "No, I don't feel it like that, but I can understand how you feel. They say that's the difference between a man and a woman—that a man looks forward and a woman remembers. At any rate, that's the difference between you and me. I can't forget what you've gone through. I can't forget your ups and downs. I don't think I am ever going to forget your

mortifications. And I don't suppose I am ever going to feel perfectly safe."

"It's as if you didn't trust me," he answered happily.

"I don't know that I do," she replied. "I don't mean to say that I don't trust your motives or your honour or your love for me. That would be nonsense, for you've got all the trust I can give. But I don't think I can trust your . . . your fate. That's what I mean."

"Oh, but just consider," he answered, "how splendidly we've brought it all off! Look what we began from; look what I began from; and look where we are!"

"Ah, that's your dear optimism," she said.

"No, no," he answered. "That's just what *is*. It isn't optimism, and pessimism couldn't change it. It's fact."

She answered only: "Ah!"

And he continued: "And I still feel that I haven't done anything for it. There's the water and the palm-trees and the lights shining all down it, and there's the blessed warmth, and there's you!"

"Ah," she said, "but you forget that we are only here, as you might say, just by the skins of our teeth. It was the day before yesterday at four o'clock that we started, and at a quarter to four you still thought that you couldn't start at all, or that you'd have to go by another way. And you forget all the miseries you have been through, and all the treacheries, my dear, that you have had to put up with."

"Oh, but all the treacheries never came to anything," he said gaily. "In the end they have quieted down. We've brought it off."

"Well, I'm not wringing my hands," she answered.

"Oh no!" he exclaimed; "you never wring your hands. Sometimes I have looked at you, and I have wondered if you had any heart at all when that wrangling was going on. But, of course, I know you have a heart. Of course I know it's only your cold exterior. I know it! I'm simply

filled with pity and concern for you. And I suppose really it's I that haven't got any heart, for all I think about in the end is just getting forward. And even when I look back and try to be as sympathetic as possible for the worries you have gone through on my account—even then I can't really worry enough for you. Of course I have my times of depression, but they're like fevers. That's the difference. You take these things coolly and you remember them. But they say it doesn't matter what agonies you have been in if you have got a touch of fever; after they are over you simply don't remember them. And if I look back on the times we have had, I just remember spots of things here and there. There are interviews with Pett, and interviews with solicitors, and interviews with pawnbrokers, and interviews with filibusters. But I have practically got to make an effort to remember every other interview that wasn't an interview with you. But when it comes to them I remember every word you ever said. I remember that when we went, for instance, from Wiesbaden to Nauheim you said you couldn't understand if I talked in figures."

"Oh, I am beginning to understand you better now," she answered.

And then he said: "I said it was all the dark forest, and you said you couldn't think what the dark forest meant. And I dare say you can't. That's probably the difference between us. When I remember what we have been through, it just seems like a dark forest that I have come out of into this starlight. I don't see the interviews plainly; I don't see the people plainly. It's just a darkness. It's just tree trunks. But we are out of the wood. Whereas you . . ."

"Oh, I," she answered—"I don't forget anything. And that's why I wish you'd get rid in some way of Mr. Pett and the Marquis da Pinta."

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "but I can't do it! And what in the world can they do to me? I can't think of it. I can't begin to think of robbing them of whatever credit there is to be got out of all this funny little affair. You see, they want credit and I don't. Besides, what can they do to me?"

"Oh, my dear," she exclaimed, with a touch of deep feeling, "if there's any credit at all you ought to have it, for you've done everything. But I don't particularly want you to have the credit if you don't want it. It's only that if you did want it, if you had a touch of selfishness, I should feel so much safer, because I should know that you'd be able a little to look after yourself. As it is, I dare say you're all right against Da Pinta, though you can't expect me to like all this when I know that you've got to fight him after all this is over."

"Oh, but, my dear," Macdonald answered, "one's got to fight duels. It's part of the day's work."

"I dare say it is," she answered. "But you can't expect me to like it."

"Oh, I'll chip a little bit off Da Pinta's wrist," Macdonald said. "It's all right, he hasn't got a chance with me."

"I dare say he hasn't," Emily answered. "I quite believe he hasn't, but it's those two, with their heads always together, whispering and jealous! It worries me. It's a worry that will go on after this affair is over. You pretend you don't care what they say. But you do. And I who don't care what they say—who don't care in the least, and you know I don't care, because I have you and I trust you—I have to be worried because you're worried. That's what it really comes to."

Macdonald, of course, was the unconquerable optimist. But that was not to say that he did not have his moments of worry, and it wasn't to say that in these moments of worry he did not commit himself to actions that were

certainly unwise. And the worries of his life had really been considerable, because they were so exceedingly complicated. That was how his absurd trouble with the Marquis da Pinta had arisen; You might have said that for months Da Pinta would have been ready to black Sergius Mihailovitch's boots. And he really didn't seem ever to have anything to say. He could talk, of course, about the weather, but he didn't appear to have any opinions. But one evening, walking home with Sergius Mihailovitch and Mr. Pett from Leicester House, Da Pinta had suddenly begun to talk. And then it appeared that he had an extravagant admiration—which was shared by all his countrymen—for the works of Alexandre Dumas.

For some obscure reason—perhaps because they had no writers of their own—the Galizians had elevated the author of the "Three Musketeers" to the position of a sort of patron saint of the country. And in Galizia, as it came out that evening, the Marquis was celebrated for his immense devotion to the works of this romantic writer. He was even the president of the National Society of Friends of Dumas—*La Sociedad Nacional Dos Amigos De Dumas*. Even at the revolution he had not been deprived of this honour. The republic had said magnanimously that it did not war against poets, so that the president of the republic was actually the vice-president of the Dumas Society, thus being the inferior of the exiled nobleman. Nay, Da Pinta had actually been invited to return to Galizia and to occupy the chair at the great national fête and bull-fight that were to be given on Dumas' Saint's Day. Da Pinta was to be amnestied for a week. And he fully intended to take advantage of this invitation, because he was anxious to do honour to the great, the illustrious god of romance. Moreover, he was anxious to get into touch with the President of the Republic so as to gather how much of a fight the ministry might be expected to

put up against the counter-revolution. These important facts he told Macdonald as they were walking through the silent emptiness of Cadogan Square towards one in the morning. He added that he fully expected to make excellent use of his visit.

"And thus," he exclaimed, swelling his chest and making a great gesture with his hand, "thus the restoration to liberty of my unfortunate country will be contributed to by the immortal shade of the great, the illustrious, the god-like poet . . ."

"*Mais, mon cher,*" Macdonald said pleasantly, "all this is positively absurd, *c'était ce monsieur qui écrivait comme un cocher de fiacre.*"

Da Pinta didn't say another word, and Macdonald forgot all about it, for immediately afterwards Mr. Pett began to talk about a pamphlet that he was writing.

Next morning Macdonald was in the midst of a good deal of trouble with the affairs of the Resiliens Motor Company. The care and attention which he gave to this enterprise was just one more of his unimportant nuisances. He didn't, of course, know anything about the motor-car industry, and that was probably why such ideas as he had were regarded by the sub-manager, Mr. Lawson, as being of singular brilliancy.

It had struck Macdonald that as the chief characteristic of the Resiliens car was the standardisation of its parts, they ought to make as much of this as they could. This had given him the idea of issuing a challenge to the other manufacturers of motor cars in this country. He offered to send six machines to Brooklands; to let them be pulled entirely to pieces by the staff on the ground, and to have all the pieces mixed up as if in a heap of scrap iron. And he said that his six cars would be put together again quicker than any three cars of other makes that had been subjected to the same process. He added other sporting features

to the challenge, such as that the Brookland officials might take away any parts they liked and then telephone to the factory for these parts to be sent out and fitted into the machines.

Mr. Lawson had said that that was all very well, but it wouldn't come off, because none of the other makers would enter the competition. Macdonald said that, nevertheless, they would have a try. And in the end, by skilfully taunting the higher officials of certain companies, he did bring the competition off. They even sold off the ground the six reconstructed cars, so that the affair was in every way a success. But it had meant an enormous amount of correspondence and an enormous amount of wrangling with the board. It came, indeed, to the Hon. Mr. Isaacstein's resigning his directorship; for Mr. Isaacstein had views which did not include the success of the Resiliens Cars. But Macdonald had Mr. Dexter very firmly under his thumb, and the other directors, if they were as stupid as owls, were at least perfectly honest men.

But into the middle of a very worrying morning, when Macdonald had one secretary at work and Lawson another, and when in consequence half the letters had got into wrong envelopes and the three telephone bells of the establishment were all ringing madly together, Macdonald perceived the Marquis da Pinta stalking into the room, dressed with unusual care in a funereal black. Da Pinta said that he wanted to have some private conversation with Macdonald about a personal matter. Macdonald asked Da Pinta whether he couldn't see that he was very busy. Then Da Pinta asked Macdonald formally to retract the infamous scandal that he had uttered against the patron saint of the literature of Galizia. At that moment three telegrams were put into Macdonald's hands, and Sergius Mihailovitch could think of nothing better to say for the moment than that he'd willingly retract having said that Dumas

wrote like a cabman ; as a matter of fact, he wrote worse than a chauffeur. Da Pinta went away in a stiff cloud of gloom whilst Macdonald was reading his telegrams.

And the next morning, whilst Sergius Mihailovitch had a bad headache and was worrying about where he could get the money for Miss di Pradella's weekly account, there came in two gentlemen with French titles and top-hats with flat brims. They were very polite and formal, and Macdonald was in a very bad temper. That did not mean to say that he was anything but polite and formal himself, but it meant that he absolutely refused to apologise. He was perfectly ready to fight Da Pinta ; he really wasn't going to be bothered with all this nonsense, and he referred Da Pinta's seconds to two gentlemen of the Russian Embassy, to whom he telephoned, thus getting the whole thing off his hands. The duel was fixed to take place during the following week at Boulogne. But on the night before Macdonald had forgotten all about it. He really had a most important interview to attend to. This was with Kintyre and a Scotch-American called Campbell, whom Kintyre had vouched for. Campbell was to find the men for the Russian battleship that was to overawe the city of Flores. It was an interview that could not be put off, because Campbell was sailing in the small hours for the United States. Thus Macdonald had another confounded rush on hand. By motoring with his seconds to Folkestone, he had just caught a boat that landed him in Boulogne towards eight. But when they reached the hotel to which they were to have gone for coffee, they found a telegram from the young King to say that he had absolutely forbidden Da Pinta to fight until their whole enterprise was safely concluded.

This really did annoy Macdonald because he had lost one of the few leisure days that he could allow himself. If it hadn't been for this folly he would have been able to

lunch alone with Emily Aldington. As it was, he didn't get back to town till seven. And in his ill temper he told his seconds that nothing in the world would persuade him to give up the duel. It was a silly thing to say, really, because he did not care two pins about it, because Da Pinta was a dirty little animal, and because, in the end, he regarded himself as having behaved with nonsensical badness. But after that, of course he couldn't very well apologise.

On Charing Cross platform he found awaiting him the young King, who had Da Pinta under control as if he were a very sulky dog. His Majesty insisted that Da Pinta should offer Macdonald his hand, and that Macdonald should take it. The fact was that, owing to the influence of Sergius Mihailovitch, the King was beginning to take his historic position with a touch of romantic seriousness. He took the whole lot of them into the gloomy grill-room of the station, and tried to bring off a speech in which he wanted to say that a king could not allow his most prominent adherents to quarrel in the very hour of organisation of a victory.

He did not bring off his speech very well, and Macdonald recognised that as things stood it was a silliness; for it would have been much better if he had been allowed to scratch Da Pinta's wrist, or to cut a little bit of skin off the top of his shoulder. That would have satisfied the whole fiery blood of the Galizian. As it was, Da Pinta, he knew, would from that moment begin to intrigue against him. Da Pinta indeed made a quite creditable little speech in return. He said that His Majesty could rely upon him for faithful services in their gracious endeavour, but as for that gentleman, His Excellency the Count Macdonald, he must expect, as soon as the King enjoyed his own again, the flick of a pair of gloves or something of that sort. And Macdonald was sorry that he couldn't think of anything better to do at the moment than just to laugh pleasantly.

It all annoyed him very much, and it annoyed him all the more to think that his manners had given way under the strain of the mere overwork and over-thinking that he had to do. He begged his seconds next day to inform the seconds of Da Pinta that he appreciated the fact that the Marquis had acted with an extreme correctitude. Nevertheless, he knew that Da Pinta was pursuing him all the time with an untiring malignancy.

He heard of it from many people, but principally from Mr. Pett. And then he managed to insult Mr. Pett himself. It came about in this way.

Mr. Pett, happening to be in a benevolent frame of mind, came one day to Macdonald at the garage to say that Da Pinta was saying the most frightful things about Macdonald. Mr. Pett tried to make Sergius Mihailovitch see what a silly thing it all was, and what nonsense duelling was in any case. He began an interminable worrying argument on the whole subject of duelling. He began it by saying that every one was talking about this silly duel, and every one thought that it was sheer foolishness—Mrs. Pett, Lady Aldington, Mr. Salt the chauffeur, and even Kintyre.

“Well, hang it all,” Macdonald said, “you don’t suppose I like all you confounded fools talking about my affairs? I tell you I have got to fight the duel.”

Mr. Pett replied that duelling was a barbarous survival that had been abandoned by all sensible people in the eighteenth century. Macdonald said that he had got to fight this duel. Mr. Pett said he couldn’t see why Macdonald shouldn’t tell Da Pinta that he was a dirty little foreigner, and that he might go and hang himself if he wanted death in a hurry. Macdonald said that he had got to fight this duel. And Mr. Pett said once more that he thought duels were silly.

At last Macdonald couldn’t stand it any longer, and,

although he realised that he was making a mistake, he said :

"Look here, my Pett, you had better save your breath for some meeting or other. You can't understand my attitude, and you never could."

Mr. Pett, who was the son of a market gardener, immediately made the reply that might have been expected of him. He said that Macdonald had told him he was no gentleman.

Macdonald replied that he hadn't said anything of the sort. All he had tried to say was that there are sillinesses, and that you can only get out of sillinesses satisfactorily in a silly way. Duelling might be a silly way, but at any rate it was a clean one.

And immediately Mr. Pett exclaimed that Macdonald had told him that he, Pett, was dirty.

Macdonald was quite good humoured, but he was really tired and not in the least in the mood either for explanation or for a theoretic discussion of the ethics of manners, so that all he said was—and he was trying to be as English as he could for his friend's benefit—all he could find to say was :

"Oh, go away and don't be a rotten fool."

Mr. Pett went away. And then gradually, in the shifting kaleidoscope of all these people that were thrown together by circumstances, Macdonald discovered that Mr. Pett and Da Pinta were forming a cabal against him.

The really weak spot of Macdonald in the whole affair was the question of the Russian battleships. Without them Macdonald wasn't going to set out upon the revolution. But this was doubly awkward, for Mr. Pett considered nothing of any importance but his own particular scheme of bribing the Galizian population. And Da Pinta's share in the execution of the affair was precisely to get the population bribed. This made Da Pinta, too,

consider that the bribery was the only matter of importance, and it threw him altogether into the arms of Mr. Pett ; for both Mr. Pett and Da Pinta thought themselves justified in asserting that not only the entire population of Galizia, but the republican ministry itself could be bribed for a few thousand pounds. And this fact Mr. Pett was perpetually dinning into the ears even of Lady Aldington herself. He couldn't let her alone ; he imagined that by the right of his genius he ought to have her ladyship entirely under his thumb.

But little by little it came into Mr. Pett's head to observe that Lady Aldington sympathised entirely with Macdonald. Indeed, Mr. Pett at last opened his eyes sufficiently to see that Macdonald was at Leicester House every day, and practically all day, and one day his own wife—his own Anne—informed him that there couldn't be any doubt that Lady Aldington was going to divorce her husband and marry Macdonald. She had heard it from Lady Aldington's own lips.

And it was perfectly true.

One afternoon Emily had rung up the house of Mrs. Montmorency in Curzon Street and had asked to be allowed to speak to Lord Aldington, whom she hadn't seen for three days. And then she asked Aldington to come and see her at Leicester House at once. Otherwise all the rest of her time was occupied for nearly a fortnight. She was only free on that afternoon owing to a sudden indisposition of the royal lady who was to have laid the foundation-stone of a hospital in which Lady Aldington was interested.

Aldington, who had been playing with the children of Mrs. Montmorency, and who was in consequence in quite a good humour, got himself into a cab and came to Leicester House.

He was more untidy than usual, for one of the children had pulled three buttons off his waistcoat, and another had

ruffled all of his hair that remained. He lurched into Emily's dressing-room and exclaimed :

" What is it ? "

Emily said : " I just want to know what you will take to let me divorce you ? I can't make it more than six figures, but I'll go up to that."

Aldington looked at her with a crooked smile that, beneath his ragged moustache, displayed all his ugly and discoloured teeth.

" You want to take up with somebody else ? " he said.

" I want to marry Count Macdonald," she answered. " If you don't convenience me in the matter I shall ask him to go away with me to-morrow."

Aldington laughed. " And what becomes," he said, " of your ladyship's position and your ladyship's example and your ladyship's good works ? "

" I've naturally thought all about that," she answered. " But it seems to me that one of the privileges of my position is that I can do what I want. That's the only reward that I can expect for what you call my good works and for the example I do set to the rest of the world. If I don't get that it doesn't seem fair. If I had to be a cook-maid I might act differently. But I don't have the pleasures of a cook-maid, and I have twice the work of a prime minister. So I consider that I have the right to do what I want." She added : " And if I haven't the right I shall make it."

Aldington looked at her with the same grin—it was all the expression that he had.

" Well, by God," he said, " living with me has made you a damned good plucked one ! "

" I dare say it is living with you that has done it ; " she said, " but the point is, what will you take ? "

Aldington said : " Oh, damn it ! " and she imagined that she perceived in his tone an air of aggrievement. He

remained looking at her for quite a long time, his blue eyes having reddish rims and being entirely expressionless. He might have been thinking nothing ; he might have been making the deep and long calculations that one imagines a bull to make when it gazes at you for a long time.

And at last he said—and this time there was no doubting the aggrievement of his tone :

“ Oh, hang it all, old girl, don’t you remember that I am a gentleman ? ”

“ I don’t see how I can,” Emily answered ; and his face really fell. “ You’ve forged my cheques for that woman ; you’ve behaved like a brute to me. How can I remember that you’re a gentleman ? ”

“ But I am ; damn it, I am,” Aldington answered. “ If I forged your cheques it was because I wanted the money and I took it ; if I behaved like a brute to you it was because I wanted to do it and I did it. That’s what you’ve just been saying ; you talked about a cook-maid. Hang it all, have I had a better time than you or than a cook-maid ? Good Lord, no ! Don’t you understand that living with you is worse than anything any cook-maid ever had to put up with ? ”

Lady Aldington considered him for a minute. “ Oh, you poor devil ! ” she said.

“ Good Lord,” Aldington went on again, “ if I wanted your money I’d go on forging cheques. I will if I do. But as for putting a price on your liberty . . . no, I am not that sort of swine.”

“ Oh, but, Aldington,” she exclaimed, “ what will you do ? You have got all those expensive habits ! You can’t get on without . . . ”

“ Good Lord,” he interrupted her, “ what a queer devil a woman is ! What does it matter to you what I get on without or what I don’t get on without ? ”

“ But I shouldn’t like to think,” she exclaimed, “ of

your having to do without the things you are used to. You must let me"

"Pack of nonsense!" he exclaimed. "If you want your liberty you can divorce me to-morrow. I shan't defend it; that's an end of the business."

"But how are you going to get on?" she asked.

"Oh, good Lord," he answered, "I don't know! What does it matter? I'll find somebody else's cheques to forge. There's the entailed property; I can always raise a bit more on that. My mother's jointure will be falling in some day. I can always blackmail her for a hundred or two. But as for hanging on to you when you don't want to be hung on to—no, I am not that sort."

Emily remained for some time gazing abstractedly at a silhouette of her great-grandfather, the eighth Duke of Kintyre, an absurd figure in a huge pot-hat that hung beside one of her wardrobes. . . .

"I don't understand it all," she said; "I thought it was going to be so difficult, and you're making it so easy."

"Oh, just stick it down in your account books that I'm a gentleman," he answered. "I remember hearing you and that young fool Tony Wellman arguing in that silly way of yours about what a gentleman was. But I can tell you. It doesn't matter what he does, and it doesn't matter what he thinks. But if you come to think of me I'll tell you what you'll think. You'll say I ragged you and I bullied you. But there was some sort of tag that we had to translate at Harrow. I don't know whether it was Latin or whom it was about. I've got no memory. But what it said was that nothing in this life became him like the leaving it. That's what you've got to stick down about me. You won't want to stick it down because you've always loathed me, but you've got to do it."

"Oh, I'll stick it down," she said.

"Well, then, that's an end of it," he answered; "that's

an end of the whole rotten jackpot. We shan't, thank God, ever have to see each other again! I guess I don't ever want to speak to you again. But you can't stick it down that I wanted to keep you away from a man you wanted. I'm not that sort of a loafer. Nothing in our joint life is going to become me like the leaving it. It's you that have got to feel mean, if either of us has to."

"I believe I do feel a little mean," Emily answered, "though I don't in the least see why I should."

Heavy and ungracious, Aldington seemed to waver on his large feet, as if he wasn't quite certain whether he had anything more to say.

"Oh yes," he exclaimed at last, "you can do this if you like! I'm a confounded waster, and Mrs. Montmorency is six times worse than I am. And there are the three children. Supposing you settled three thousand pounds a year on Matilda Montmorency. No, don't settle it; have your solicitors to pay it quarterly, and stop it if you hear she's tried to mortgage it in any kind of way at all. And let the three children have five hundred a year each for life after the mother's death. That won't inconvenience you?"

"No, it won't inconvenience me," Emily said. "I think it makes me feel rather obliged to you."

He looked at her threateningly. "Mind you leave it at that," he said; "mind you understand that I don't ask it as the price of your liberty. I ask it so as to give you a chance of obliging me, and that puts you under an obligation to me because you want to oblige me. You will have a better taste in your mouth."

"Well, I'm not saying that I am not grateful," Emily answered.

Aldington squared his shoulders and breathed deeply.

"Then, thank God, it's over!" he said. "I feel as if I'd dropped a beastly big knapsack." And he went out of the room.

II

BUT in however quiet and civilised a manner all this might be arranged, there was no getting away from talk about it, so that the only person who was at all interested in these subterranean matters and who did not know that Lady Aldington was divorcing her husband—the only person who was quite ignorant of it was Sergius Mihailovitch himself. This came about from the peculiar nature of his relation with Emily. He must have seen her certainly every day, and on some days two or three times, but he never really once saw her alone. He would indeed have lunched with her alone at Leicester House but for the fact that when that day came he had been engaged for his duel at Boulogne—death and the hazard of death having precedence of all lunches and the hazard of love. Thus it might be said that in all the things that they could know of each other beneath public eyes they were extremely intimate. Kintyre had really taken that side of the matter in hand. He had fixed up his cousin's engagement book for her.

He wasn't a man that did very much entertaining of his own, though now and then he gave a dinner, or in the summer took people to race meetings on a coach. But he had at his orders at least a dozen subservient hostesses who would give entertainments when he wanted them, and ask anybody whom he wanted to have asked. Thus he saw to it that Emily was asked for every night of her

life, and that Sergius Mihailovitch was asked on the same nights. And he saw to it too that Macdonald and his cousin were sent down to dinner together. And once that sort of thing is started it continues itself. There wasn't any lack of people who wanted to have Lady Aldington, and they were all of them glad enough to get Sergius Mihailovitch.

It considerably extended Emily's visiting list. It made her coachman familiar with parts of London that they had never thought of officially penetrating into. They went into Bayswater, and they went into Hampstead, and they even went into Bloomsbury. And in extending Lady Aldington's visiting list it extended, too, her view of life.

For until about this date it can't have been said that she was much more than something like the energetic wife of an extremely lax clergyman. Aldington, that is to say, had the duties of his station; he was a landowner and a peer of a great Whig line. He didn't attend to any of his duties, and so Emily had conceived that it was for her to take them over. She had, moreover, the duties of her own station—of her immense wealth, of her slum properties, and of her never-ending "interests." So that, what with attending to the social duties of the two incapacitated Radical cabinet ministers, what with clearing out the rookeries in Glasgow, and conscientiously looking after the administration of hospitals, she simply hadn't had any personal life at all in the ten years of her marriage to Aldington. Of that sort of semi-public life she knew almost everything. She was as well able to manage a committee as a bank clerk was to manage his fountain-pen. This had given her the touch of coldness and hardness with which she had managed Mr. Dexter. It wasn't so much that she was rude as that she had only just time enough in which to do all that she had to do. She couldn't afford to be bothered by listening to the protestations of

Mr. Dexter or of anybody else. A meeting was a thing convened to do a certain amount of work. At every meeting there would be a number of persons with a number of different kinds of selfishness. These people had to be silenced somehow or the meeting couldn't do its work. So that to any such meeting she always went fully advised of what she wanted, and perfectly determined to ignore anything that wasn't in the nature of a sensible objection to one or other of her determinations.

In almost the same cold way she had considered her relations with Sergius Mihailovitch. She hadn't any doubt that she wanted to marry him, and she determined to be in a position to do so whether he was or wasn't. So she simply spoke to her husband and instructed her solicitors without ever having spoken to Macdonald himself. It was an odd, cold, obstinate way of going about things ; it was the sort of thing that makes foreigners speak of the English as having a spleen. And she hadn't any moral scruples of any kind. She felt in herself precisely that she was a public officer with public work to do, and that as long as she did her public work, what she did privately was just her personal reward if she liked it when she got it. She probably could not have put it into words—or she would never have thought of putting it into words—but within her was the feeling that that was what distinguished her as an aristocrat from the rest of the world. A great lady did what she wanted, and it was right ; other women had to have standards because they had to have standards. She couldn't have imagined any other way of looking at it.

Kintyre's dinners, however, introduced her into an entirely new world. She came across dishes that she would never have imagined, and points of view that she never believed to have existed. It wasn't that many of Kintyre's friends were Bohemians ; it was simply that all of them

were irresponsible. With a certain sort of shyness she came across ladies whose blood, titles or positions were certainly the equal of her own ; and they would have extravagantly blonde heads, high voices, and views about the opera. She came across men who were certainly the superior of Aldington in both blood and position ; and these men ran theatres, conducted Bohemian clubs, or gave all their attentions to one form or another of fashionable mysticism. And the odd thing, as far as she herself was concerned, was that as far as she could see there was nothing really wrong with these people.

From her old standpoint, which was that of a district visitor on a scale so gigantic that she seemed in a wholesale way to district-visit the entire empire—from her own standpoint it had been almost criminal to think of such a thing as an opera at all. But here she came across ladies of position whose whole mind seemed to be given up to collecting attendances at the opera for all the world as if they were collecting postage stamps. Why, six of Kintyre's friends went off in a body to Budapesth, men and women mixed up in order to attend the production of an Egyptian fantasia by an Hungarian composer called Gay-Korskaoff, with words by an Italian poet called D'Annunzio.

Lady Aldington really had never imagined that such a thing would be possible, yet one of the gentlemen who made this journey was a British ex-prime minister, who paired for the purpose. It is perfectly true that this gentleman was of a political opinion opposed to that of Lady Aldington's friends, but although she had heard him speak at least twenty times she hadn't been expecting to find him a member of what the Countess Macdonald would have called the idle and dissolute Smart Set.

Yet what Lady Aldington had seriously considered to be the duty of serious people in mid-October and early November was to shoot pheasants. Serious people bore

the burden of the empire, of the poor, and of the administration of trades and industries for nine or ten months in the year. Now and then they shot pheasants in order to recover their healths. They visited each other in country houses for this purpose, and when they weren't actually amongst the fusillades of the dripping covert sides they were discussing serious matters in the smoking-room or even at the dinner-table. That late autumn and early winter she had her usual house parties for her usual three big shoots at Aldington Towers. She had her usual guests, except for the fact that Aldington was not there, and Macdonald and Kintyre, and Mr. and Mrs. Pett, and Mr. and Miss Dexter, and the King of Galizia and the Queen-Mother were.

The laws of the country demanded that Aldington should not sleep beneath the same roof as his wife, but Lady Aldington's very efficient solicitors—Aldington was employing no solicitors at all—decided that it was just possible that Aldington should show himself at some of her political teas. Emily wanted this, because she wanted to delay talk for as long as possible. It wasn't that she disliked talk, but simply that if there was much of it it might make it necessary for her to have an understanding with Sergius Mihailovitch, and with a feeling of shyness she didn't want to come to an understanding with him before she was in a position of absolute liberty. So that whilst she was giving her shoots, Aldington was understood to be absent on business in Nova Scotia—and, indeed, Aldington had gone to Nova Scotia with Mrs. Montmorency on the suggestion of Lady Aldington's solicitors. In this way there was established what is called legal desertion on the part of Aldington.

But, in the queer way that lawyers have of regarding these things, her ladyship's excellent solicitors could not see anything against her ladyship's husband being present

at her tea parties. It was to be imagined that his lordship in removing his effects from Leicester House must have occasion for conversation with her, to which not even the King's Proctor could take exception.

Thus, quite frequently enough to confuse the social commentators, the large and awkward figure of Aldington was seen in the background of his wife's guests. And, moving about near him there was also to be seen the form of the unconscious Sergius Mihailovitch.

It wasn't so much that Sergius Mihailovitch was really obtuse, but simply that the sort of thing was entirely unfamiliar to his foreign mind. He would never have thought of it; indeed, it would have seemed rather obnoxious to him. He would not have wanted to be in the same room with Aldington in these circumstances. So that when the light did burst upon him it gave him one of several of his bad days. But it came rather slowly.

There was a firm of solicitors called Holland and Buss who had twice written to him asking him to make an appointment for some purpose that they did not specify. Macdonald, imagining that they wished to propose to him some business deal connected with the Resiliens Motor Car Company, did not answer their letters, for he thought they might just as well say what they wanted before wasting his time. But something like a fortnight later he received a bulky and registered letter that, although his correspondence was very heavy, seemed to claim his attention, because it was marked "private" and his business secretary had not opened it. He tore the envelope negligently, and then perceived a sheet of writing paper with the heading of Messrs. Holland and Buss. And along with it came a quantity of bluish-grey paper, endorsed on the folded back in a rather faint type-writing, all in capital letters: "Draft of a Deed of Separation between H.E. the Countess Margaret Macdonald and Count Sergius Mihailovitch Mac-

donald, Aide-de-camp to H.I.M. The Emperor of Russia, etc., etc." And in their letter Messrs. Holland and Buss begged His Excellency to call on them for the purpose of discussing this document. Macdonald did not look at the deed, but he stood for a moment reflecting. Then he told his secretary to strike out any engagements that he might have for that afternoon, and to telephone to those gentlemen that he was coming to see them at once.

Mr. Buss was a sleepy, untidy gentleman, in a grey coat, with erect grey hair, a reddish hooked nose. He was rather stout, and at first he seemed to regard the whole matter as an immense joke. He became, however, decidedly concerned as soon as Macdonald placed upon the table the draft deed.

Sergius Mihailovitch said: "You can make this out as soon as you like, and I'll sign it."

Mr. Buss leant a little forward over his table and chuckled. He said that if Macdonald would give him the name of his solicitor they could discuss the matter. Macdonald said that he didn't want any discussion. He hadn't got a solicitor of his own.

"I haven't looked at the deed," he said. "I don't in the least know what it contains, but I am ready to sign it whatever it is."

Mr. Buss sat up rigidly in his chair. He did not appear to believe his ears, and gradually a look of concern came into his eyes.

"But I say," he exclaimed, "look here, you know——!"

"It's perfectly simple," Macdonald said. "I will give Her Excellency exactly whatever she asks. I won't discuss anything, because any discussion of the sort would be unpleasant to me."

"But——" Mr. Buss exclaimed.

"That's really an end of the matter," Macdonald said; and he rose from his chair to go.

"But, look here!" Mr. Buss exclaimed energetically, and, rising from his chair, he almost fell backwards over its arm in his excitement. "We can't do business like that. Such a way of coming to an agreement has never been heard of in all the history of the divorce courts!"

"Then it's got to be heard of now," Macdonald said. "You understand that I wish the Countess to have everything that she desires. Or can't you understand that?"

"But really," Mr. Buss protested, "I must insist on your consulting a solicitor. It simply can't be done like this. Supposing—supposing . . ." And Mr. Buss wavered for a moment. Then he went on with relief: "Supposing that in after years there should be any question of the document. It might be held to be harsh and unconscionable."

"But there will never be any question of the document," Macdonald said.

"But your heirs might object?" Mr. Buss protested.

"I haven't got any heirs," Macdonald answered. "I just want you to understand that I want her Excellency to have every stick that she asks for."

Mr. Buss's voice became soft and confidential. "Of course I recognise," he said, "that you are acting with a most extraordinary handsomeness. I've never met any one who acted with more handsomeness. But the point is that there might be such a thing as giving the Countess more than she asks for."

"Then you can just cut the surplus out of the deed," Macdonald said.

"But really," Mr. Buss answered, "I can see that you intend to be most amiable, but you do put us into a confounded difficulty."

"It's more than I can understand," Macdonald said. "What do you want me to do?"

"Why, of course, we want you to consult a solicitor," Mr. Buss answered.

"But what's the good of consulting a solicitor?" Macdonald asked. "I've already said that I will give you all you ask."

"No; but really do get a solicitor to have a look at the deed," Mr. Buss said; "all this is so extraordinarily irregular. Don't you see that this deed, which you haven't read, might perhaps, let's say, now—let's say it might prevent your marrying again?"

"But I haven't the least desire to marry again," Sergius Mihailovitch said, "not the least desire or intention in the world."

At this Mr. Buss's jaw fell right open. "But, good God," he exclaimed, "is the Countess mad?"

"I should say," Macdonald answered amiably, "that Her Excellency is quite mad. That's really the trouble, you know."

"But then . . . " Mr. Buss sat down in his chair in an ungainly heap. He ran his hand through his untidy hair and gazed at his blotting-pad.

"Of course, it puts us in an impossible position," he said; "because I don't mind telling you—without prejudice of course—that the Countess *does* want to marry again!" And then he started uneasily and exclaimed: "You really mean what you say—that you will give the Countess all that she asks? You won't take advantage of my slip? But it's such an extraordinary position."

"My dear man," Macdonald answered, "I shan't take an advantage of your slip because I don't know what your slip is. But I certainly shan't prevent Her Excellency marrying again if that is what you mean. Why should I? As far as I am concerned I regard her as a dead person. She simply isn't there. She simply doesn't exist."

"Of course that makes it more comprehensible," Mr.

Buss said. "But all the same it's very queer. It's very *queer*."

Macdonald laughed: "I don't in the least understand you," he said. "It seems to me that I am acting in the only possible manner for a decent man."

"That's just it," Mr. Buss said; "they never do act in that manner. That's what's thrown us off our balance. We expected—the Countess represented that you would make all sorts of objections. So we prepared the deed in the expectation that you would."

Macdonald laughed. "I am very sorry for you personally," he said, "but I will do everything that I can to help you. What do you want me to do?"

Mr. Buss straightened his back and resumed something of the hopeful attitude of an ordinary man.

"All that's wanted," he said, "is that you should consult a solicitor. He'll explain the matter to you. You understand that I can't professionally do it."

"Well, I'll consult a solicitor," Macdonald said. "I seem to gather that you want me to instruct a solicitor to fight your own deed."

Mr. Buss really sighed with relief. He rose from his chair and, coming round his table, patted Macdonald on the shoulder.

"Oh yes, do that!" he exclaimed. "That's all that we want. You understand that our position has been extraordinarily difficult. The lady . . ."

"Oh, I quite understand that your position has been difficult," Macdonald said.

Mr. Buss smiled affectionately. "You mean to say," he said, "that you've had fifteen years of the same sort of thing?"

"I didn't mean to say anything at all," Macdonald said.

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The immediate result of this interview, as far as Macdonald was concerned, was that at about half-past eleven of that night Miss Dexter came knocking at his door that gave on to the mews. This was inconvenient to Macdonald, because he had Miss di Pradella upstairs in the garage. Miss di Pradella had come to fetch a dozen embroidered pillow slips which a stupid firm of tradesmen had sent to Macdonald's address instead of hers, and she had declared that she couldn't possibly wait for them till next morning. So that it was by the merest accident that Macdonald heard Miss Dexter knocking at all, for he had merely come down into his room to fetch the parcel, and had intended to go straight back to Miss di Pradella and out with her by the Little Walden Street entrance.

So that when he saw Miss Dexter, pale and dishevelled in the light of the mews lamp, he couldn't do anything but exclaim :

" My God ! "

She walked straight past him and into his room. She exclaimed :

" The Countess has asked me to come and see you. "

" But at this time of night ? " Macdonald protested.

" The Countess says that she couldn't possibly sleep unless she gets this matter settled, " Miss Dexter quavered.

" I don't want her to have a bad night. "

" But you can't stop here, " Macdonald said. " We'd better go to your hotel. "

" I'm not stopping at the hotel, " the girl answered. " I am stopping with the Countess at Putney, and Popper's away at Liverpool over a cotton deal. " She added rather dismally, " You can't say I'll be compromised if the Countess is waiting outside. "

And, at an end of his resources, Macdonald answered :
" I can't say anything. It's beyond me. "

He took up the parcel of pillow slips and exclaimed :

"At any rate, however monstrously you may tyrannise over me, I've got to have three minutes to myself." And he ran upstairs to deliver her parcel to Miss di Pradella.

Miss di Pradella insisted on opening the parcel then and there to see that the pillow slips were the right ones. What with the opening and the packing it up again she managed to occupy a full ten minutes, and before the final knot was tied Macdonald was aware that Miss Dexter had climbed the corkscrew stairs and was coming towards them in the aisle between the two rows of automobiles. She was paler than any one he had ever seen in his life. It was all extraordinarily bewildering.

It had come about in this way. No sooner had Macdonald left Mr. Buss than that gentleman sent the Countess a telephone message to say that he had had an interview with Macdonald and wanted to see her. But it was full six o'clock before the Countess arrived in Savile Row. Mr. Buss was upon the point of leaving the office, because he had an engagement for bridge at his club at ten minutes past six. Thus, when the Countess arrived with the distracted Miss Dexter in attendance upon her, Mr. Buss became in the worst of tempers. In the ordinary course he would have said that he was out. But something had gone wrong with the telephone in his own room and he had come down to use the instrument that was in the clerk's office. Thus the Countess caught him at it, and indeed she had marched into Mr. Buss's room, followed by Miss Dexter, before that gentleman had left the telephone. This really did seem to him what he called a little too thick. He followed her agitatedly—it is possible that he might not have been the celebrated and skilful divorce lawyer that he was had he not been a person of more human passions than is usual in a solicitor. He found the Countess glaring at him with very large eyes and flushed cheeks.

" You've seen Sergius Mihailovitch ? " she said.

" Yes, I have," Mr. Buss answered ; " I've seen Count Macdonald, and let me tell you, you've dished the whole show. That's what you've done ; you've cooked your own goose, because the Count is an absolute gentleman. You shouldn't have tried that sort of game on with the Count. Because that's what he is, a perfect gentleman."

The Countess looked at him ironically. " Of course, Sergius Mihailovitch would take a man like you in," she said. " He takes everybody in except me ;" and then she added slowly and contemptuously, " I thought you represented me, not him."

" So I do," Mr. Buss said. " I wish I didn't."

" This doesn't seem a conventional way to treat a client," the Countess exclaimed.

" It isn't," Mr. Buss answered ; " but if you want me to continue representing you the matter has got to be treated in an unconventional manner. Now listen to me. If you want me to go on with your affair you've got to leave the matter entirely in my hands. You've not got to go confusing me by misrepresenting your husband's character. I know what you want. You want all his money and all his furniture and his title, and as much as you can get of his prospects ; and you want him to let you divorce him ; and you want to damage his character in the divorce case as much as you can. Well, I can guarantee to arrange all that if you let me alone. But with the muddle you have got things into at the present . . ."

" What is the muddle I have got things into at the present ? " the Countess asked sombrely.

" Simply this," Mr. Buss answered with exasperation, " your confounded husband agrees to every silly blessed thing you made me stick into this agreement."

" Well, that seems to be all right," the Countess said.

" Is it ? " Mr. Buss snarled. " It simply means that

you won't get your divorce. That's what you've done, you've dished yourself."

He pulled off his office coat and snatched another from the nail at the back of the door. Whilst he was struggling into this he said :

"You've dished yourself, that's it. Do you suppose that your husband is going to let you discredit him just because you ask it, when all the while he can get what he wants in this confounded separation deed? Do you understand that? He's got you caught out of your own mouth. You simply haven't got a chance. You worried me into producing a deed that would prevent your husband from remarrying and you from remarrying. You thought that in that way you would blackmail him! Yes, blackmail him! You've offered him those terms, and you can't get out of it if he accepts them, and you're done if he does. Is that King's English enough for you to understand it?" And Mr. Buss clapped on his broad-brimmed silk hat and shook a heavy finger at the Countess. His game of bridge was calling to him insistently.

"I can't spare any more time," he said. "I've got an urgent appointment. You go away and reflect upon it, and let me know to-morrow whether you agree to my handling the case or else you find another solicitor."

The Countess dragged the agitated Miss Dexter down to Putney in a taxi-cab. And then, reaching that place about seven, they began to discuss the matter in the room that contained the oak chests, the warming-pans, and the grandfather's clock.

The Countess discussed the matter with an extreme eloquence from all its aspects. The chief thing which she made out of it was that Sergius Mihailovitch was a cunning devil who could take in the Arch-fiend himself. He was determined to treat her with the most refined cruelty, even if he had to sacrifice his marriage with Emily Aldington in

order to do it. What Sergius Mihailovitch really was, she said, was a mean scoundrel who would starve her and cheat her out of all her rights. But now he wanted to pose as a gentleman. And the way he did it was the meanest thing of all. By pretending to give her what she wanted he was cheating her out of the possibility of marrying Kintyre.

It was exactly three hours before Miss Dexter got a word in—that is to say, it was ten o'clock. Then the unfortunate Mamie managed to say that she didn't believe Sergius Mihailovitch knew what he was doing when he offered to agree to all that the Countess wanted. She believed that he was just simply ignorant of the niceties of English law. She supposed that he thought he could have the deed of separation and the divorce as well. The Countess, of course, confuted this theory with an immense vigour. She said that it was absurd to say that Macdonald was a fool when every one in the world knew that he was a hardened villain steeped in the practices of the idle and dissolute Smart Set. How was it possible that he could not know about the divorce laws when the idle and dissolute Smart Set talked of nothing else? But for once in a way Miss Dexter held firmly to her opinion. She said she believed that Sergius Mihailovitch was just ignorant. She said even that Sergius Mihailovitch was just as innocent as a Boston boarding-school miss.

"Oh, he's a silly fool!" the Countess conceded. "I'll admit that he's a fool whenever being a fool can do mischief, but it's his fate to work mischief one way or the other."

But at last Miss Dexter got the Countess down to a sort of a wager. She staked her intelligence upon the point that, if the legal aspect of the case could be put to Sergius Mihailovitch, Sergius Mihailovitch would perfectly readily agree to let the Countess have her divorce. And

that really started in the Countess a new train of thought. It made her, moreover, exceedingly eager to get the matter settled that very night. For if that could be done before morning she would be able to tell Mr. Buss that she had settled the matter without his aid. She wanted to be able to snap her fingers in Mr. Buss's face.

"It's very odd to me," Miss Dexter said, "that you don't seem to hate Mr. Buss. He was real rude to you. Real, downright rude! And you don't seem to mind it a bit."

"No, I don't mind it a bit," the Countess answered. "That's how I like a man to treat me; if he's right he is right, or if I can dish him, as he called it, I'll dish him. But there aren't any maudlin frills about him. He speaks to me as if I were a man, and I speak to him back as if I were a man, and that's what I want."

"Then there's no wonder," Miss Dexter sighed, "that you can't get on with any one as perfectly lovely as Sergius Mihailovitch."

"No, I've no use for that sort of fool," the Countess answered.

And having got her mind set upon it, she whirled Miss Dexter right up to the door of Macdonald's lodgings in the mews. She made Miss Dexter knock, and then withdrew into the shadows of the passage.

"But ain't you coming with me?" Mamie exclaimed helplessly.

"Certainly not," the Countess answered. "Do you suppose that I would soil myself by entering those polluted doors?"

"But shan't I be soiled too?" Miss Dexter answered.

"You!" the receding Countess called, contemptuously. "Do you suppose that any man would be suspected of so much as looking at you?"

It was in this way that Macdonald had both Miss Dexter

and Miss di Pradella on his hands in the garage at Little Walden Street. But Miss di Pradella did not occupy his time all along. He had to take her out into Regent Street and find her a cab. When he came back he found that Miss Dexter had retired into his room downstairs.

"Couldn't you," he asked, "have stopped in the garage? It would have been much more respectable."

"No, I couldn't," she answered. She shivered. "I couldn't stand all those automobiles in that dim light. They seemed to be watching me like dragons—like wet monsters."

Macdonald sighed. "Well, what's it all about?" he said.

"It's just this," she answered. "The Countess thinks that you aren't going to let her divorce you."

"Now, see here," Macdonald said. "This isn't at all the proper sort of talk for a girl like you. How old are you? Nineteen. . . . I never like to talk about Her Excellency, and I never like to blame her, but I think it's the most outrageous and disgusting thing that I've ever heard of a woman doing for a young girl in her charge."

"Oh, what's the use of talking like that?" Miss Dexter wailed. "Are you going to let the Countess divorce you or aren't you?"

"Of course I am," Macdonald said. "I've told those fools that I'll let them do anything they want. All this is infamous! It's execrable!"

A profound misery had indeed descended upon Macdonald—a blackness of despair such as had been familiar to him in the days of unbridled repression after the failure of the Russian revolution. He didn't feel able to think; he didn't feel able to move. He just sat in a chair with his hands hanging beside him.

"In the name of God," he said, "what have I done to get mixed up in this sort of loathsome business?"

Miss Dexter was sitting on the bed facing him. "Oh, don't!" she exclaimed. "I believe you're going to cry."

Macdonald looked desolately at her. "I wish I could," he said. And then he added, "I see you've got your glasses. Do they do you any good?"

"Oh, it's heaven!" Miss Dexter exclaimed. "It's just heaven! I haven't had one of my headaches since the day I put them on. And if ever I bless you for anything, it is for making me go to that old oculist."

"Well, you certainly look much better," Macdonald said absently. "You're putting on flesh . . . But be off now; you can't keep the Countess waiting."

Miss Dexter said, with a sudden touch of vindictiveness, "I don't care if I keep the Countess waiting all night or six weeks!" And then suddenly she broke down and began to wail out: "Oh, do say that you'll let the Countess have her divorce! Do say that you'll let the Countess have her divorce! I said you would if the divorce law could be explained to you, but I can't explain it to you. I only know that if you sign that deed she can't get her divorce, and oh, I pledged my word that you aren't that sort of man. Don't give me the go-by. Don't do a thing like that. I don't know what it's all about, and I'm very tired. But if you don't do what's wanted she can't remarry, and then you can't marry Lady Aldington."

Macdonald was too tired to pay much attention. "What's all that?" he said.

"I said you won't be able to marry Lady Aldington," the girl answered.

Macdonald suddenly stood up. "Look here," he said, "that's the second time that you've said that to me. I am quite ready to believe that you're innocent, but you haven't the right to say that sort of scandalous nonsense to my face."

"But Lady Aldington is divorcing her husband so as to be able to marry you," Miss Dexter wailed.

Macdonald said harshly: "Who told you that nonsense? It is absolute nonsense! It was the Countess who told you that. Don't you understand that that woman's mad about that sort of thing? Can't you understand that?"

Miss Dexter looked at him tremulously and solemnly through her glasses.

"Do you mean it?" she said. "Do you honourably and honestly mean it? Isn't there anything at all between you and Lady Aldington?"

"My dear child!" Macdonald said. "There's nothing! Absolutely nothing! I'd as soon think of marrying you as of marrying her."

Miss Dexter's lips parted, but no sound came from them.

"Look here," Macdonald said again, "it's scandalous to have to talk to you about this sort of thing, but if you've got to have this sort of thing talked about, it's as well that you should understand that it's a decent world and not the loathsome sort of place that you've been made to think it. Listen to me! There's nothing whatever between me and Emily Aldington. I admire her immensely; I don't admire anyone else in the world as I admire her. But I never had the least idea of marrying her. I might say that you've put the idea into my head, and that would be absolute truth. Of course, if she could divorce her husband—it's nonsense to talk about it, for she never could and she never will—but if she did, and if the Countess divorced me, I would marry Emily; but it's the absolute truth that I'd as soon have thought of marrying you as of marrying her. I haven't thought about these things at all. Don't you understand that I'm a busy man, with a great deal to do in the world? I haven't time to think

about this sort of thing, I never do ; all my thoughts are taken up. If I wanted to analyze my feelings I should say that I felt that it was pleasant to be going along beside Emily Aldington as a stream might flow along the level grass of meadows. That's a Russian way of putting it ; it's too flowery for England. But I'm a Russian, you know, and I feel a great deal more than I think, and that's how I feel."

Miss Dexter looked at him piercingly.

"It's true that you never thought of marrying her ? " she said ; "and it's true that you'd have just as soon have thought of marrying me ? "

"Oh, of course I'd have thought about that much sooner," Macdonald said kindly. "Because of course she's got a husband and you haven't."

"And I've put it into your head about marrying her ? " the girl said slowly. "And it will never go out of your head again ? "

"Well, I don't suppose it will," Macdonald said. "Once a concrete idea is born in the head of us Russians, you know, it never dies out, just because concrete ideas are so rare with us. I dare say I shall think about marrying Lady Aldington for the rest of my life. Of course, it will have to be for the rest of my life, because it's all nonsense about her divorcing her husband. That's just the Countess's jealousy. But now, run along. I hope your mind's at rest."

"I've put it into your head ! " Miss Dexter repeated.

"Well, you've certainly done that," Macdonald said cheerfully.

The girl suddenly pitched forward right off the bed, her face striking the floor, which was very hard, because underneath the carpet it was of concrete. Macdonald simply didn't know what had happened. It was as if one of the

windows had fallen out. And then, having in his eyes the disagreeable feeling of the colour of her face as she lay quite still, rather grey and rather blue, he rushed out into the mews, calling at the top of his voice :

“ Margaret, Margaret ! ”

The Countess answered him from the shadows of the passage. She wanted to know with cold disdain what was the matter. He ran at her and gripped her wrist.

“ That girl’s fainted,” he said. “ How could you do such an infamous thing as to send her to me ? ”

The Countess pulled her wrist from his grasp. “ She’s in love with you,” she said. “ She wanted to come.”

“ Well, in God’s name,” Macdonald exclaimed, “ come and bring her to ! ”

“ My good man,” she answered clearly, “ do you think I would enter your rooms for anything under the sun ? Just you manage your love affairs yourself. I’m going back to Putney.” And indeed she was gone before Macdonald could say another word.

He didn’t in the least know what he did. He knew that the girl’s eyebrow was badly cut because one of the glasses was broken into it. He knew that he got a doctor by shouting into the telephone, and that somehow or other the doctor managed to make a nurse arrive at the same moment as himself. And the next thing that he really realised was that towards nearly four o’clock in the morning Miss Dexter, lying on his bed, opened the one of her eyes that wasn’t covered by a bandage, and seeing him and the nurse standing beside her, exclaimed after a moment or two :

“ It’s just heaven,” and then began to cry.

In those four hours or so Macdonald really hadn’t been conscious of anything that he would have called concrete, he had been too deep in his own particular dark forest. So

that, although his light had burnt with its accustomed and painful brilliancy, it had appeared to him that darkness was all round him.

Then he went to a Turkish bath and spent the remainder of the morning in it.

III

IT seemed for some reason or other natural to Macdonald to apply to Kintyre for the name of a firm of solicitors. He had no particular respect for Kintyre's intellect, though he was prepared to credit him with a rather shallow but yet acute knowledge of the world. He had indeed seen a good deal of Kintyre because of that gentleman's maritime knowledge ; for Kintyre had spent much of his life in yachting, and, indeed, when his prospects of attaining to the title had in his early life seemed obscure, he had passed several years in the Royal Navy. Kintyre, with his maritime knowledge, knew also a great many of the tribe of younger sons and the disinherited with whom Macdonald would have to man the Russian warship. Of the Russian warship, which was indeed a battleship called *Admiral Trogoff II*, there was now no doubt, though it had never come to telegraphing about the lampreys of the Don. The Grand Duke, having occasion to come to London upon a ceremonial visit, had taken occasion also to inspect the various deeds that had passed between Macdonald and his royal and financial associates. Thus H.I.H. had a perfect confidence that he would get his money, and the battleship, which had already broken down off Toulon, was lying, in perfect condition, in that harbour, and was already the property of a shipbreakers' syndicate. Kintyre himself, taking with him a naval captain, had inspected the *Admiral Trogoff II*, and reported

that she was exactly what was wanted. But the getting the crew together was not by any means a matter without its little difficulties.

The navigating crew and the stokers were easy enough. They signed on in Cherbourg, most of them English time-expired seamen, for an indefinite cruise beginning on April 4. But when it came to engaging the fighting men, the gunnery lieutenants, and a possible landing party, various more or less humorous difficulties did arise. They came mostly from Sergius Mihailovitch's determination to avoid bloodshed and plunder. So that although there was not the least difficulty in getting five or six hundred men all more or less well calculated to handle a rifle or to train thirteen-inch guns of the latest Russian pattern, it needed a great many personal interviews to make certain of the men. Macdonald and Kintyre interviewed them at one club or another. Thus, there was a genial scoundrel called Grant, an ex-gunnery lieutenant of the British Navy, who later had been in the Chilian Republican Service. Grant was everything that was wanted to command the expedition as long as he had a strong hand over him. He was, of course, a ferocious drunkard, but, as the *Admiral Trogoff II* would carry no liquor at all, and all the men would be personally searched on coming aboard, and all the cabins of the officers were by their consent to be searched by three of Kintyre's gamekeepers, the danger of El Commandante Grant's getting drunk would be limited. But even if they kept him strictly sober, Grant swore that it was a principle of his never to go upon any filibustering expedition without having at least three shots with a heavy gun at something or other. They couldn't get him to promise not to do this. There was simply nothing that would make him. In a whimsical sort of way he swore that it wasn't decent, that no man could hold up his head before his Maker if he had commanded an

eighteen-thousand-ton battleship and not fired one single shot with its heavy guns before she went out of commission. He said he wouldn't do it; he said he couldn't do it, and three was his minimum. If he could see a flagstaff on an isolated hill he would pot at that; but at something he would pot, laying the gun himself. And they had to leave it at that, because they had to have Mr. Grant. In the odd, ferocious underworld of men that in these interviews came up before the eyes of Macdonald and Kintyre, like creatures of the ooze swimming in the light of day, El Commandante Grant had a position of so much importance that they could not afford to do without him. He was even a man of some substance, possessing a duck-farm of his own at Cholsey-on-Thames. There, whether he was full of liquor or whether he wasn't, he had, he said, to be dabbling with water, sweet or salt, cold or hot.

Thus this particular side of the venture was shaping itself with Commander Grant for the captain and with Kintyre as a sort of super-cargo. Kintyre, it was understood, would carry upon his person four Browning pistols and would shoot anybody at sight. Macdonald had no need to doubt Kintyre's coolness or courage. He never showed the least signs of excitement, and from various persons, more particularly from his Russian friends, Macdonald heard that Kintyre was quite as cool as could be wanted. He had, for instance, walked about the fortifications of Vladivostok under the Japanese fire with his hands in his pockets. His Russian friends supposed that this was either showing off or the mere spleen of the Englishman. But in either case it seemed to be good enough for what Macdonald wanted. Moreover, he heard from a man who offered himself for engagement that, in one or two disreputable and tight quarters in Portuguese East Africa, Kintyre had used his Browning pistols with accuracy and dispatch. The man had seen it himself.

It was in this way that Sergius Mihailovitch had seen a great deal of Kintyre. And in one odd way or another, in his manner and in the inflection of his voice, Kintyre had struck Macdonald as either taking a great, if cool, interest in Macdonald's affairs, or else as having, in some way that Macdonald did not care to inquire into, some sort of finger in the pie. As a matter of fact, Sergius Mihailovitch was the least inquiring person in the world. A constitutional dislike to talking about his own affairs, and a strong determination to let no other person talk to him about them, rendered him really rather solitary, for no man can be really liked in England who will not talk about himself in a way that most foreigners feel to be as indecent, or even more indecent, than appearing without clothing in a public place. Indeed, even Kintyre had only once dared to approach Macdonald in any personal matter. This, to go back, had occurred on the night after Lady Aldington's reception, when Dr. Farquhar had talked about the Nationalisation of Scottish railways.

On this night, whilst Macdonald was going down the stairs of Leicester House, Kintyre had slipped his hand under his elbow. He had said that he wanted to speak to Macdonald upon an urgent personal matter. Going along Lowndes Square there had been too much noise from the motors that were leaving Lady Aldington's. But when they came in front of the French Embassy in the dark silent spaces of the park, the Duke, who really knew his man, said suddenly in his cold, level tones :

"Look here ! What is your balance at the bank ? "

And Macdonald, who understood that Kintyre would not ask for the purpose of mere impertinence, answered simply :

"I'm exactly two pounds thirteen shillings overdrawn."

The Duke took out from his coat pocket an envelope which showed white in the darkness,

"Then look here," he said again, "you'll oblige me by paying this into your bank by to-night's post. You will please to put it to a separate account in your own name. You needn't know the amount of it if you don't want to; you needn't draw on it, though of course you can if you wish to. It represents a sum that I and some friends of mine wish to put into your adventure. We pay it into your hands unconditionally; but, of course, you will credit it to us as our share."

Macdonald remained silent for a moment, and the Duke continued :

"It will also very much oblige me if, in the letter you send to your bank manager with the enclosure, you instruct him to answer fully and unreservedly any questions that may be asked by any person whatever as to your credit at that bank."

Macdonald still remained silent. Anything like a financial transaction filled him with an extreme dislike. It seemed to him to be as indecent as a personal question : but after reflecting for a moment or two, as they walked, he saw that, as these political transactions must mean the manipulating of immense sums of money, so he must brace himself even to the trouble of keeping accounts, which again appeared to him to be an almost indecent proceeding. It caused him really to feel extremely shy, as shy as if another man had been trying to enter into personal relations with a woman. But as he had to face it, and as Kintyre knew probably what he was about, he answered simply :

"I will do exactly as you ask."

"You understand," said Kintyre, "that you're in a disgusting country where you can't do anything if your personal credit isn't safe. I haven't any comment to make on this. It's just exactly so. It isn't necessary for me to say that we exactly trust you, but it's necessary for us, as we're interested in your scheme, to put you into such a

position that we may rebut any assertions we may hear about you. For I don't mind saying that several persons, and one person in particular, are trying to wreck this scheme by asserting that you are a penniless adventurer. We know you aren't, but we've got to prove it, or the whole thing will go to pieces on that nonsensical ground. It's a thing that really doesn't concern you. It's nothing to do with your personality."

"I know it hasn't," Macdonald answered. "I dislike the whole thing. But I quite understand it's a necessity. I know I can't make romantic omelettes without breaking my own fantastic eggs. Let it go at that. I am much obliged to you, Kintyre, and I'll do exactly what you ask."

They reached the colonnades at Hyde Park Corner, and Kintyre got into his motor, which had followed them. Macdonald spent the greater part of the night in walking about the streets, because it was a disagreeable matter to him.

It was on the next morning that, at the meeting, Kintyre had knocked over Mr. Dexter by producing the letter from Macdonald's bank manager, stating that Sergius Mihailovitch had sixty thousand pounds to his credit; and Macdonald didn't give any more thought to the matter, because various large sums began to be paid to him for the expenses of the counter-revolution. This was not to say that he did not know the extremity of a personal poverty that quite amused him.

With a rather excessive scrupulousness he had waited on his bank manager to instruct him solemnly that these two accounts were to be kept entirely separate, and that he wasn't to be allowed to overdraw in his own name one penny more than the bank would have permitted if he hadn't had any account at all. And the manager amiably listened to his instructions, and said that he perfectly

understood. But, nevertheless, it is probable that the second account did remain in the manager's mind when Macdonald went on to propose certain arrangements that were really only for the benefit of Miss di Pradella. He proposed, that is to say, that the bank should take over the whole of the remainder of his much mortgaged Russian property, and that they should pay the young lady, with this as a security, the sum of ten pounds a week for a year, with the capital sum of two hundred and fifty at the end of that time. And when the manager quite amiably consented to this arrangement, Macdonald really sighed with relief, for it meant that, roughly speaking, Miss di Pradella would be off his hands for at least twelve months, and in the mean time he was having her carefully educated in dancing by the ballet master of the Talavera Theatre, who reported that if she had had the slightest spark of ambition, instead of being quite unreasonably lazy, she might develop into one of the great dancers of the world.

But even this wasn't to say that Macdonald didn't know what it was to be from time to time literally without a shilling. He hadn't, that is to say, the least idea of how to manage money. If he had ten pounds in his bank he certainly spent it the same night in treating some one or other—it might be one of the filibustering scalliwags ; it might be Miss di Pradella ; it might be Da Pinta, or it might have been Mr. Dexter himself, who was worth just about a million times as much as Macdonald ever had in his possession at that portion of his career.

He really began to know the ways of pawnshops with an extreme intimacy, and the more distinguished brokers treated him with courtesy and attention. When he had pawned all his jewellery and replaced his studs and links with imitations, they obliged him by sending assistance to remove even his personal effects from the little room that

gave into the mews. So that, as often as not, Macdonald would possess only the suit that he was walking about in, though the pawnbroker would always oblige him by letting him exchange his morning suit for the evening clothes that were held in pawn in the back of the shop. As a matter of fact, at this stage, the pawnbroker would have let Macdonald do anything he liked, for he regarded him as an eccentric millionaire, and Macdonald had a way of attracting the affection of all Jews, though he personally disliked them. At the same time he insisted that all these business arrangements should be punctiliously observed, so that once, although Messrs. Zimmermann had offered to oblige him with a hundred pound note as a loan, Miss di Pradella, coming to his room to borrow five pounds in order to purchase some linen at a white sale—Miss di Pradella had to sit down on the iron slats of Sergius Mihailovitch's bedstead, for he had been forced to send his bed-clothes into temporary exile.

She had, however, to wait for her five-pound note until two days later, when, providentially, the Resiliens Motor Car Company paid Sergius Mihailovitch his quarter's salary of two hundred pounds.

This sum would have gone further than it did but for the fact that Miss di Pradella had acquired so large a collection of linen of one kind or another that, her flat being too small to contain it, she was forced to ask Macdonald to take another room for her in the same building. This she did with a great reluctance, because she really disliked asking him for money except when it was a matter of buying linen, and then her moral sense deserted her. The two hundred pounds lasted Macdonald fairly comfortably for about six weeks, and he got through the remainder of the quarter in one way or another. Moreover, as the next quarterly instalment fell two days before his setting sail for Galizia, he was able to do this with all his equipment

intact, and even engaged a valet for the time whilst he should be on Lady Aldington's yacht.

It is not to be imagined that he either starved or was even very much worried during this period of six months or so. Indeed, worry about money was a thing entirely foreign to his nature. He would have promised almost anyone at any moment two hundred and fifty pounds as a gift, and somehow or other, up to this time, he had always managed to make it good. And the hospitality of London was so profuse that although upon occasion he had to walk home from a dinner, he was never without a dinner to go to, though occasionally he couldn't get a lunch for want of the money. As for breakfast, there was a very ugly old woman who came in every morning from the mews. She made him a cup of tea, cut him some bread-and-butter, and very perfunctorily put his bedroom in order, but that was all the attendance that he got.

It was part of his scrupulousness that he never used the Resiliens' cars to take him from place to place, except when it might have been in the nature of an advertisement, just as it was possibly part of his unscrupulousness that he never troubled much about returning the hospitality that he had from one person or another. And it was probably part of the usual sunniness of his disposition that what for most men would have been sordid in his circumstances never troubled him in the least. It struck him rather as fun, or perhaps even as a rather British and business-like proceeding, to negotiate with the pawnbroker, though it is perfectly true that his negotiations worked out in his merely taking whatever was offered him.

Just every now and then it appeared to him quaint that he should pass for one of the best dressed and wealthiest young men in his particular set. That he did this he knew very well, because it was forced upon his attention from time to time. Thus, at one of his several clubs Mr. Reggie

Wyndham approached him one day and asked him what sort of socks were likely to be worn next spring. Sergius Mihailovitch answered that he simply hadn't the least idea. At this Mr. Wyndham rejoined :

" Oh, that's nonsense ; you know you're the best dressed man in London. Some of us think you're even over dressed ; but, at any rate, I know half a dozen fellows wait till you put on something new and then go and order it."

" So that I set the fashions ? " Macdonald said ; then he laughed, for, as a matter of fact, the state of his wardrobe was very much governed by accident, or by the will of Messrs. Zimmermann, who advanced money on portable property.

On another occasion the Earl of Portadown approached him at Lady Aldington's and suggested that they should go shares in buying the lease of the Talavera Theatre and running it themselves, because it was said that Mr. Montagu Everard was giving up that flourishing business at the request of his wife. Portadown said that they would not need a capital of more than eighty or ninety thousand, and when Macdonald said that he couldn't spare the money, Portadown answered resignedly :

" Well, I suppose it's not very much in your line, but I thought you wouldn't mind chucking the money away upon a little flutter."

And Macdonald, who happened to have three coppers in his right trouser pocket, clinked the coins agreeably, and answered :

" My dear fellow, I'd willingly throw away all the capital I possess on anything that amused me, but I can't imagine that running a theatre would be anything but a beastly grind." And upon the whole Portadown was inclined to agree with him, and as Mr. Everard had not the least idea of selling the Talavera the matter fell through.

Just for minutes now and then it would come into

Macdonald's head to wonder whether he was not in what his wife would have called the halls of the gilded great by false pretences. And then again he would remember that he was actually a man of respectable substance. He was worth two thousand eight hundred pounds a year, and he was as well born as anybody he could possibly meet, whilst his official position and his own title gave him precedence on an equality with an English earl. There wasn't anything technically the matter with him, for it was entirely his own affair if he chose to allow the Countess two thousand pounds a year, and if various other people without any claims swallowed up the greater part of the eight hundred pounds.

But if these things didn't worry him at all, or worried him in the very least when he was tired with running about or rendered unwell by his housekeeper's tea and bread-and-butter, which were things that he detested, he had other depressions enough. And his depressions came from that essential dark forest which is the heart of another. He had to come across so many basenesses, little and big, and so many mere selfishnesses, big or little, and whether these affected himself or merely other people, they troubled him beyond all reason. It was the one thing that really affected him. As a person with a training into which French literature and the French spirit had entered very largely he was perfectly able to stand as it were erect, and to say cynically, when he heard of basenesses or of cruelties : *" Cela vous donne une fière idée de l'homme ! "*

He was perfectly ready to avow that his fellow-beings were wolves, and that the only way to attain to prosperity and happiness was to be a kingwolf of some pack. But always at the bottom of his heart there was the feeling—it may have been part of his Russian blood or it may have been part of his English public-school training—the feeling that all humanity, if you could understand them, if you

could get at them in the right way, were at least as chivalrous as himself. That a Russian Czar or a royal bureaucracy should execute a hundred and fifty thousand political prisoners a year did not disturb this serene philosophy. For that was part of their game—of their particular political game, and as you would expect nothing else, it was neither dishonest nor disappointing. It would be the same thing with a British squire who stole common land from his cottagers, or with a British workman who stuck his coat up a steampipe in order to ruin his employer's costly machinery because his employer's foreman had refused to let him steal three hundredweight of coal. That was the sort of thing that you expected.

And even from his Countess there was literally nothing that he didn't in the end expect. The trouble was that he just simply couldn't discover what her code of morals was. He never had been able to. He had at first taken her to be honourable, truthful, patient, with some sort of comprehension for humanity and particularly for himself. But one by one all these things went by the board. And, though he let it go at that, he couldn't arrive at any fixed standard whatever. She seemed to be perpetually breaking out in a new place. He couldn't have imagined that she would have been capable of sending Miss Dexter to him as she had done, and he couldn't have imagined that she could have been capable of leaving the girl in the lurch as she did. That sort of thing gave him such severe shocks as to render him really ill. His mind was too sensitive to stand it, and for the time being he would be deprived almost of his senses and his power to control himself.

It was on the following day that he sought the advice of the Duke's solicitors, Messrs. Lumsden and Lumsden. The particular Mr. Lumsden that he saw was a young alert man, with a touch of the Jew in his appearance, though actually he was not a Jew at all. But he wore a navy

blue tie with many white spots upon it. He listened with attention whilst Macdonald concisely and seriously gave an account of his interview with Mr. Buss, the Countess's solicitor. Macdonald related how he had said that he was perfectly ready to sign the deed of separation as it stood, and how appalled Mr. Buss had immediately become ; and he related that Mr. Buss had become still more appalled when he had said that he wanted the Countess to have exactly all that she asked, and how Mr. Buss had quite literally fallen down when he had said that he didn't in the least want to marry anyone in the world. And Sergius Mihailovitch was aware of feeling exceedingly naïve before this young man when he explained that he was still perfectly bewildered and could not in the least understand what it all meant.

"And what does it really mean ? " he asked.

Mr. Lumsden gave a perfunctory glance at the deed itself and then burst into a fit of laughter that lasted several minutes. He couldn't stop himself. When he was quiet Sergius Mihailovitch continued :

"I ought to add that although at the time I hadn't the least idea of marrying any one, to-day I distinctly wish to do so, though of course I haven't any prospect of its coming off."

Mr. Lumsden pushed the deed a little further away. "Oh, that will be all right, that'll be all right," he said confidently and comfortingly. "I don't in the least want to know whether you want to marry or not. I will fix it all up for you with Mr. Buss. It will be perfectly easy."

"But what does it all mean ? " Sergius Mihailovitch asked.

Mr. Lumsden evaded the question. He began to ask for details as to what facilities Sergius Mihailovitch could give the Countess for divorcing him. Had there been any act of cruelty ? Could Sergius Mihailovitch throw a teacup

at the Countess? And when Macdonald said that he certainly couldn't do anything of the sort, Mr. Lumsden sighed slightly and said that it would have to be desertion.

"Now, what about adultery?"

"Oh, look here," Macdonald said, "that's your business! You've got to arrange all that."

"Well, you've got to be at our disposal," Mr. Lumsden said, "more particularly at the disposal of Mr. Buss. As we're obliging them he's bound to make the circumstances such as will not be disagreeable to you. Now, about the desertion. Of course you've got to stop the Countess's allowance until she files her petition."

Macdonald exclaimed angrily: "I'm damned if I will!"

"But, my dear sir," Mr. Lumsden exclaimed, "you've got to! That's the law. You can't help the Countess to what she wants if you don't commit an offence against her. And you've either got to hit her or stop her money for form's sake. There's no third way, but you can just take your choice of those two."

"But if I do stop her money," Macdonald said, "you've got to explain with absolute clearness to Mr. Buss that it is for form's sake."

"Oh! of course, of course," Mr. Lumsden said soothingly. "Then there's really nothing more to be talked about. You'll put yourself quite at the disposal of Mr. Buss. That means to say that you'll stop at the same hotel in Brighton—that's the best place—with any female you like to pick up anywhere. And you'll enter your name in the hotel books as Count and Countess Macdonald or Mr. and Mrs. Thompson—whichever you like; but the former's better, because it saves much of the expense of identification by waiters and chambermaids."

"But I'm hanged if I'll drag in my name—the name of my ancestors. . . ." Macdonald was beginning hastily.

"Then make it Mr. and Mrs. Thompson," Mr. Lumsden said quickly. "Don't pray get excited. This is what the law asks. You've got to satisfy the law."

Macdonald remained silent.

"Of course you've got to have your name dragged in," Mr. Lumsden said. "It will be in the papers. If we don't defend—and we shan't—the papers won't pay much attention to it; but you've certainly got to have your name dragged in."

Macdonald simply bowed his head. "All right," he exclaimed after some time, "I shan't make any fuss. It's to be exactly as you want."

"Then that's all," Mr. Lumsden said. He pushed the deed still further from him. "This document isn't worth the paper it's written on. The Court will grant the Countess a third of your income, and your furniture and effects will revert to you."

"But I've already said," Macdonald exclaimed, "that I want the Countess to have the whole of my income from the Russian Government, and she's to keep all the things."

"That's a matter of private arrangement afterwards," Mr. Lumsden said; "it's nothing whatever to do with the law. We can't make an agreement before the divorce, because that would be collusion and it would stop everything."

"But what's the meaning of this agreement, then?" Macdonald said almost violently. "What does it *mean*?"

A queer as if inward smile passed over the face of Mr. Lumsden.

"It means," he said, "that by English law . . ."

"I don't want to hear about English law," Macdonald said. "It appears to be a disgusting thing. Here you've got two people perfectly willing to separate, and it can't be done without one or other of them consenting to make what the English law would consider a beast of himself."

"Well, I'm not here to talk about English law," Mr. Lumsden said, "neither are you; but unless you let me explain what the English law is, I can't tell you what this document means."

Macdonald remained silent, and then Mr. Lumsden tentatively continued:

"By English law this agreement for separation renders any subsequent divorce impossible. That is why Mr. Buss does not want you to sign this deed of separation."

"Then why did they ask me to sign it?" Macdonald said.

Again Mr. Lumsden smiled. "Why," he said, "that was simply because Messrs. Buss wanted to get more out of you than they supposed you to be willing to give."

"But they must have known!" Macdonald exclaimed hotly. "The Countess must have known that I would give her anything she asked."

Mr. Lumsden waved his hand. "Either the Countess didn't know it or else she represented it otherwise to Messrs. Buss. She represented, in fact, to Messrs. Buss that you were determined to leave her to starve and to marry some other lady. So to fight this, Messrs. Buss put forward a deed which would make it impossible for you to marry anyone else, in order to make you behave handsomely to the Countess if she consented to divorce you. I hope I make myself plain, for that is all that this document was meant to do. So, of course, when Messrs. Buss learnt that you were ready to sign it, they were naturally thrown off their legs, for it certainly appears that their client is anxious to remarry, whilst you aren't. That gives us the absolute whip hand over them. Your Excellency can dictate any terms that you like."

"I don't want to dictate any terms at all," Macdonald said wearily. "I want you to arrange it so that Her Excellency gets everything that is provided for in this

deed, together with whatever facilities she wants for divorcing me. Of course, I don't wish to be made to appear too much of a villain. But if that is what your law insists on, your law can have that too. You understand."

They left it on that basis, though of course Mr. Lumsden made it plain that he would have to fight all the points in order to concede them gracefully afterwards. To Macdonald that seemed an imbecile proceeding, but Mr. Lumsden said it couldn't be done otherwise, as a vague functionary called the King's Proctor would be always on the watch to smell out any trace of agreement between the parties, as he called them. He warned Macdonald that he would have to receive from the Countess a pitiful letter asking him to return to the domestic hearth that he had so heartlessly abandoned. But as this letter would be dictated by the Countess's solicitors in order to make certain that there was nothing in it that would give a handle to the King's Proctor, Macdonald was to take no notice of it.

Personal poverty hadn't affected Macdonald in the least, but this obscure fumbling in the unpleasant background of what appeared to him unholy indiscretions affected him quite horribly. It was like playing a game of make-believe in which every one of the details was obscene. And for a great many days he went about in a state of deep and lasting depression. His Countess had indeed broken out in a new place. He couldn't believe that she believed that he was ready to leave her to starve. On the other hand, she had certainly said just that to her legal advisers. If she had said it without believing it it was revolting, but if she believed it it was revolting almost beyond belief. She couldn't believe it. Yet the uncertainty weighed upon him. He wanted to write to her to point out that she must know that such a course of conduct would have

been impossible to him. But Messrs. Lumsden absolutely forbade him to write. They said that the King's Proctor could call for all the documents in the case, and that this letter alone would be sufficient to prevent a divorce. So that, in a Russian phrase, all his soul shivered on the brink of uncertainty. It had to continue to shiver.

Mr. Pett might by now, as far as the affair of Galizian revolutions was concerned, be regarded as Macdonald's political enemy. And Macdonald imagined that, this being the case, Mr. Pett would avoid any personal contact with him. But this was not the case.

They had, of course, to meet in a social manner, here and there, and they had to behave themselves, which Macdonald was quite capable of doing. But on the occasion of one of Lady Aldington's shoots they were all stopping at Aldington Towers together—Kintyre, Macdonald, the Petts, the Dexters, the Galizian royal family with Da Pinta in attendance, and twenty or thirty gentlemen and ladies of Whig opinions who did not much count, though they provided an agreeable background at dinner and in the smoking-room, where they told anecdotes until far into the night.

It was on the sixth and last night of his stay that Mr. Pett heard that Macdonald, Kintyre, and a Lady Vulliamy, who was a distant connection of Lady Aldington, were going to stop on at Aldington Towers for the week-end after the crowd of them had left. Mr. Pett heard this by accident at dinner, because Kintyre said across the table to Macdonald that if the morning was at all decent they would ride over and see the otter hounds at work in the neighbourhood of Northiam. Mr. Pett had already been informed by the butler that his train to town left at ten-fifteen. The otter hounds would not be at work until about eleven of the following day. Therefore Macdonald must

be going to outstay Mr. Pett. He turned indeed straight upon Sergius Mihailovitch and said :

“ You’re stopping on then, I understand.”

Macdonald said : “ Yes, I’m stopping on until Tuesday.”

And Mr. Pett grunted : “ What about Furness and Furness ? About the ammunition ? You were to have seen them to-morrow.”

Macdonald answered : “ But unfortunately Lord Surbiton has just wired to me that he has got the influenza, and can’t see me until Tuesday afternoon.”

Mr. Pett choked in his throat. He couldn’t eat any more dinner, and he couldn’t think of anything, because his emotions were too strong for him ; for after that he imagined that there could not be any doubt that Macdonald had more influence with Lady Aldington than he with all his genius. And this appeared to him to be a positive sin against God, for whenever Mr. Pett had deigned to talk to Emily she had listened to him with a deference that seemed quite proper. So that at the end of the meal, when the ladies were leaving the gentlemen, Mr. Pett got up from his chair, approached her, quivering with excitement, and said that he must positively have some words with her before they went to bed, as he wouldn’t see her on the following morning, and she was stopping at Aldington Towers for a fortnight.

Lady Aldington said that it was a fine night, and that she would meet him on the south gallery of the terrace in about ten minutes, or as soon as she had seen that the ladies had had their coffee in comfort. It had rained hard all day, but now it had stopped, and she said they would both probably be better for a breath of fresh air.

In his public utterances Mr. Pett would have declared that it was the duty of Lady Aldington to admire—even to adore him for his eminence and wisdom. She ought to hang upon his lips waiting for the words that should show her how

to conduct her public duties. Indeed, had Mr. Pett known what was the male equivalent for an Egeria, or even what exactly an Egeria was, he would have declared that he ought to be her ladyship's Egeria. In private he had the feeling that his physical charm and the brilliant bitterness of his wit ought by now to have forced her to become his mistress. He wanted more than anything to be able to boast to a small but admiring circle that Lady Aldington was his mistress, and indeed he had already hinted as much to this small group amongst whom he felt really at home. These were the disbanded members of the Putney Fabian Society, who had followed Mr. Pett when he had gone over to Toryism ; they regarded Mr. Pett as the greatest influence of his day, and no doubt he was, for at that date this writer set the whole tone of life for an almost uncountable multitude of younger men and women.

He was used to being taken as a poetic philosopher ; he was used to being looked up to by adoring eyes, to be listened to with the parted lips of absolute attention. His " conquests " among women and female disciples of the middle and lower middle classes had been so numerous and so extremely facile that in his moments of unbending he was accustomed to say that the Englishwoman was extraordinarily immoral—though, of course, he had never recorded this opinion in print—and he regarded himself really as the sultan of the world.

It is true that according to his own standards Mr. Pett had been very badly treated by her ladyship. Emily Aldington had regarded the little cockney as a friend of Sergius Mihailovitch, and any friend of his she considered to be worthy of attention. Thus she had listened to Mr. Pett's quite brilliant conversation with a serious attention, though she had always disliked shaking hands with him. But, with Mr. Pett, to listen to him with serious attention was, for a woman, a sign that she was ready

to be seduced by him when he chose to throw down his handkerchief.

At that date—in late November—he had already been told by Mrs. Pett that Lady Aldington was wrapped up in Macdonald, but though the announcement had at first put him into a fever of rage, as the weeks had passed and he had seen absolutely no sign of any understanding between Sergius Mihailovitch and Emily, he had gradually come to take it for an accepted fact that that story was only a manifestation of Mrs. Pett's jealousy. For the only manifestation of jealousy that Mrs. Pett allowed herself over all her husband's numerous infidelities was at times, with a faint malice, to disparage the lady who for the time being occupied the time in her husband's attention that she considered ought to be devoted to his work. And that Mrs. Pett should say that Lady Aldington preferred to the attentions of Mr. Pett those of Sergius Mihailovitch, Mr. Pett considered was a serious libel. It belittled the intelligence of Emily Aldington ; it was as if she were accused of preferring the man to the master.

For there is no denying that Mr. Pett considered Sergius Mihailovitch to be immensely his inferior. It must be remembered that Mr. Pett, being a writer, regarded himself as immensely the superior of any man who did not write books. This is an attitude very common amongst politico-economic writers. Mr. Pett indeed regarded himself as a sort of priest. He would not have said this in public, but it was what he felt in his heart. And since he regarded himself as the finest serious writer in the world of his day, so he regarded himself as the high priest of the world. He had no respect for any other man unless that man happened to possess a title—and a British title at that. Thus he regarded Sergius Mihailovitch with a contempt that can hardly be measured. For Sergius Mihailovitch had never done anything. He had never written a book or a news-

paper article; he hadn't even so much as written a poem. He seldom showed any gifts of argument, and he practically never talked about Sociology, Hygienics, or the New Toryism. He was therefore just nothing, though from time to time in the moments of warm generosity that he undoubtedly had Mr. Pett remembered that it was by taking Macdonald's money that he had been able to make a start as a writer. For Mr. Pett had commenced his career of public usefulness as booking-office clerk at a suburban station, and it had been at a Fabian meeting that he had impressed Sergius Mihailovitch with the sense of his enormous gifts.

Thesky above the terrace of Aldington Towers was of a jet black with many stars powdered all over its face, and some of them hanging twinkling between the black boughs of the large elms that fringed the terraces. The night was exceedingly still and exceedingly cold. The black buildings rose up behind the terraces in a rigid mass that in the darkness presented an air of venerability. Aldington Towers was unfortunately a modern edifice of the very worst type of Victorian architecture. The original building had been destroyed by fire in the year 1873, and the present house, which was supposed exactly to reproduce it, contained three hundred and sixty-five windows, each one being a slab of solid plate glass four feet by three in dimensions. But all of its newness the night hid. From four of the plate-glass windows a warm light poured outwards, and up and down a long stone, balustraded terrace Mr. Pett marched in a fur coat, in the bitter cold. He had a little champagne in him, and he was upon the point of being screaming mad with rage before he perceived Lady Aldington opening one of the French windows, which was so brightly lit, and coming out upon the terrace.

Mr. Pett plunged straight upon her. "Look here,

Lady A," he exclaimed, " this battleship business has got to be stopped ! Do you understand ? It's just got to be stopped."

" No, I don't understand," Lady Aldington said.

She walked straight across the terrace and leant upon the balustrade, looking out upon the darkness to the southward. A very long way away on the shore of the sea a lighthouse whirled round intermittently, and by its light Mr. Pett had two momentary glimpses of her face.

When she stood looking out like that, and it was a characteristic habit of hers, it always seemed to him as if she were superintending the landscape itself. That was it. It was as if she looked at that great expanse of country not for the pleasure of looking, but just in order to see whether it still remained pleasing to her, and whether she would not have some of it altered. And in the two glimpses that he had, Mr. Pett perceived that her face, even in the darkness, preserved still that aspect of cold power. Mr. Pett knew this lady had bought the whole town of Berkhamstead-on-Sea so that square blocks of lodging-houses should not spoil the perfection of her view to the south. And when Mr. Pett considered that this cold woman of great power was bowing her head not before him, but before a man whom he considered to be the dirt under his feet, Mr. Pett so nearly screamed with rage that his voice had a high and piercing note.

" It's got to be stopped," he exclaimed ; " it's ruining the whole show ! "

Lady Aldington remained looking at the view for an instant longer, and then, as if she was satisfied with its invisible intactness, she began to walk along the terrace. Mr. Pett moved beside her.

" I have no control of this matter," she said, " and I don't understand why you select this moment to talk to me about it."

"I've talked to you about it thousands of times!" Mr. Pett exclaimed. "You know thoroughly well that I disapproved of it from the start. Our counter-revolution . . ."

"No, you are quite incorrect," Lady Aldington said; "you have talked to me many times about your disapproval of the employment of armed force. But you have never talked to me about my stopping it. That is the distinction, and I do not understand why you select this moment to talk about that."

"It's got to be stopped!" Mr. Pett exclaimed.

Lady Aldington reflected for a moment. "Then you must stop it yourself," she said, "by using your influence in a legitimate manner."

"But don't you understand," Mr. Pett urged, "that these battleships are relics of barbarism? The counter-revolution which we are setting up has got to be made not by the employment of militarism, but by the use of the more subtle power of economic reasoning. It's only gold that is the real force, not because it bribes, but because it is the ultimate end of all revolutions. What's the use of setting out upon this affair if it's to be carried out by old-fashioned methods? What's the use? It's no use at all. It isn't a thing that any intelligent man would have anything to do with. It will be just the old story. I don't want to have anything to do with old stories. It's not my business; I'm an imaginative writer. It's my business to meddle in things if something new is to be done, but it's not my business if it's only a matter of doing the old things in the old way. Can't you understand that?"

"I quite understand that," Lady Aldington answered, "but I don't understand why you talk to me about it. That is a matter for yourself alone."

"But don't you understand," Mr. Pett exclaimed, "that you have the power to stop it?"

"I have no power at all," Lady Aldington answered. .

"But you are finding all the money," Mr. Pett said,—
"all the money that this fool Macdonald has at his disposal
for bringing about this foolish scheme."

"I have no power at all," Lady Aldington said, "none.
I am in the hands of Count Macdonald."

"But that's outrageous," Mr. Pett shrieked; "that's
infamous!"

A sudden panic overwhelmed him; it was as if he were
being swept along by a dark, swift force. He seemed to be
exactly in a nightmare. Supposing he had been awake
he ought to find some damning adjectives that should
prove to this woman that Macdonald was a negligible
trifle. But he couldn't think of any adjectives. That
was why it was like a nightmare.

"I don't see that there is anything wrong with the arrange-
ment at all," Lady Aldington said; "it is simply sound
common sense. It is just a business arrangement. If I think
he can do it better than I, I am absolutely in his hands."

"But oh, my God!"—Mr. Pett exclaimed; and he
clutched his furred motoring cap with both his hands.
"Don't you see . . ."

But he could think of nothing that he wanted to make
this woman see except that he himself was everything
and Macdonald nothing. He could not tell how he was
going to put that into words.

Lady Aldington said: "No, I don't understand what
you want me to see."

"Don't you see, then," Mr. Pett exclaimed hurriedly,
"that I am a better man than he is?"

For him the world seemed for a moment to stand still.
It was absolutely still; there was no motion in the boughs
of the elms, there was no rustling in the dark leaves of the
laurels. No beast moved in the frozen meadows of the
park lands below the terraces. And suddenly Mr. Pett
found himself continuing:

"Don't you see that I'm the better man? How can you confide yourself to such an empty, idle-brained, useless adventurer? He's never done a thing; he's never thought a thought; and you, who are the most wonderful woman in the world, put yourself in his hands when you might put yourself into mine."

There was such a note of honest tragedy in his voice—and indeed then Mr. Pett spoke more honestly than he had ever spoken before—that Lady Aldington in her turn spoke to him more attentively than she had ever done.

"Mr. Pett," she said quite gently, "I think you mistake the issue. I am quite ready to believe that you are a better man than Count Macdonald. You may be more practical; you may be a much greater thinker; you are certainly the most wonderful mere talker that I have ever met. But you must excuse me if I say that these are not the things that I want when I set out upon such an enterprise as the one in which we are interested in common. It is a great responsibility that I feel that I am taking. We are going to influence the lives of large numbers of persons. That is nothing new to me; I have been used to the idea all my life. And what I want is to be certain of my man—to be certain of his goodness of heart."

"This is all confounded nonsense," Mr. Pett interrupted violently.

"No, it isn't nonsense," Lady Aldington answered gently, "it's just a question of what we want. You have just said that it was not your business to have to do with anything that wasn't something new. You said that no intelligent man would want to have to do with anything that wasn't something new. It may be that, as you have said, Count Macdonald isn't an intelligent man, and that may be why I have selected him to put my trust in. I don't know about that; but, you see, I don't in the least wish to have anything to do with something that's new."

That isn't my business in the world. I suppose that what I really want to do is to preserve whatever old goodnesses there may be in the world. I am not in the least ashamed of being old-fashioned. There's nothing whatever that even you could say that will make me ashamed of being old-fashioned. And what has made me trust Count Macdonald in this matter is that he seems to have the old-fashioned goodnesses, and just because he has the old-fashioned goodnesses I think he is the right person to re-establish a kingdom along the lines of old-fashioned happiness and contentment. Even if I were dissatisfied with Count Macdonald I could not trust you in this particular matter. You are not to be trusted ; you don't lay yourself out to be trusted. You proclaim that the only business of an intelligent man is to invent something new."

"But this fellow," Mr. Pett exclaimed, "this unintelligent useless fellow of a Macdonald . . ."

Lady Aldington stood still for a moment.

"Count Macdonald," she said slowly, "never thought an unworthy thought and never did an unworthy action. He is what you and I aren't, and what almost no one is to-day—he is chivalrous ! And it is chivalry that I am looking for in the world, and that I should like to reintroduce into the world. I don't know that my affairs will prosper in the hands of this gentleman, but I know that he will never do anything that is against my heart. That is what I should like you to understand. And I really do think that if Count Macdonald puts his mind and his whole soul into any adventure, that adventure will prosper. I think he will never prosper himself, and that is because he is quixotic. But it is a great thing to have in any sort of an enterprise a man with a quixotic spirit, if only because it prevents your doing injustices that will set many people against whatever your undertaking may be. Of course, I know that this is not clever talk and it is hardly

worth your while to listen to me. But you seem to wish to know what my attitude is in this affair, and in that case it is as well that you should know that what I think of Count Macdonald is that his 'strength is as the strength of ten because his heart is pure.'"

Mr. Pett exclaimed in a high scream, "My God!" and then again "My God!" And clutching his fur motor cap with both his hands, he really reeled on his feet, and with extraordinary acid laughter in his intonation he exclaimed once more:

"It's outrageous; it's infamous! You get me here!—me!—to listen to quotations from Tennyson! Me!"

"My dear Mr. Pett," Lady Aldington said, "it isn't my business in life to select my quotations with care. That's your business."

"But it's outrageous!" Mr. Pett said once more. He couldn't think what had become of his vocabulary. He couldn't understand how it was that he had only one or two words that he had to use over and over again. He only knew that between himself and this cold woman there seemed to stretch an invisible stone wall. He didn't know what it meant. "It's outrageous! You get me here to chant your love for Count Macdonald in an early Victorian dialect and with quotations from Tennyson!"

"It seemed to be only proper," Lady Aldington said, "to let you know of my love for Count Macdonald."

"Proper!" Mr. Pett exclaimed, and suddenly he began to laugh. He laughed on and on, exclaiming from time to time, "Proper! that's a funny word."

Mr. Pett indeed was extraordinarily hard hit. His successes had always been so facile that it would be safe to say that he had never known what failure was, and now suddenly he found himself up against this stone wall.

There had never before been anything that he hadn't been able to wriggle round, to creep under, or to scramble

over. Now he was up against it, and then he did what he called forgetting himself.

"Your ladyship means," he said, and his voice still had the high laugh of incredulous scorn—"your ladyship means to tell me that your ladyship is your ladyship. Your ladyship means to tell me that your ladyship and that . . . that fellow are of a different blood from me. You want to say that you are a different order of being—you and he. I am just a person who talks. I'm nothing, that's what you mean to say."

He stopped, and then exclaimed: "That . . . fellow an aristocrat! Who'd have thought it! Why, I've known him since he was twenty. In all sorts of places: Fabian meetings; low public-houses when he hadn't got a penny! . . ."

"He'd given you all his money," Lady Aldington said sharply. "You victimised him."

"I dare say I did," Mr. Pett continued, "but you mean to tell me that that stupid fool who let himself be victimised by me is the sort of person that is too high and mighty even to wipe his boots on me."

"I hadn't thought of saying that," Lady Aldington said. "But I dare say that is what I really did mean."

"But, my God!" Mr. Pett exclaimed. "You don't *understand*! You don't understand how I've despised this person! I've looked down on him for years and years! It's impossible for me to take him seriously."

"I quite understand that you've despised him," Lady Aldington said; "that's the new thing that you have discovered—how to despise a man for being good to you and for making your fortune."

"My God!" Mr. Pett exclaimed for the ninth time. "Can't you see that it's a *privilege* for a man of that kidney to be allowed to look after a man like me?"

"I quite understand," Lady Aldington answered, "that there is that way of looking at it; and you can understand—you do understand that it is a privilege for a woman of my kidney to look after Count Macdonald. And that is what I am going to do."

Mr. Pett had often thought that if he had been a mere writer of stories instead of a political philosopher he would have written a scene between a gentleman of lowly birth and a woman of high society. They were going to love each other passionately and to realise that it would not do. So that at the end of Mr. Pett's story there would have been a regretful scene, the gentleman's head being bowed and the woman of high breeding looking back over her shoulder as she vanished in the distance. They would speak slowly, carefully, balanced words in a rhythm that gradually faded out. Now Mr. Pett was as nearly in the middle of such a scene as he was ever likely to be in his whole life. He spluttered violently:

"What you mean to say is that you are an atrocious snob."

He had a sense in the darkness that Lady Aldington was making the motion of gathering her garments together.

"I dare say I am," she answered. And she went away towards the lighted window.

It struck him that her emotions were so singularly businesslike that she could not be imagined to have any emotions at all. It was as if she had just polished off a necessary piece of work at one committee meeting and was going on to another. She certainly did not look back over her shoulder.

For a moment Mr. Pett thought only that the scene had been extraordinarily unrounded and inartistic. Then it struck him that he would no longer have the run of Leicester House and be able to talk to the ex-members

of the Fabian Society of Putney about it. Then he exclaimed to himself :

“ By God, I'll go there all the same ! She can't shut her doors on me, considering what I know about her.” And then suddenly he pulled off his motor coat and ran violently down the terraces on to the rough frozen grass of the park.

It was the full bitterness of things suddenly coming upon him after, for a moment, he had been numbed. He felt a passionate desire to conquer that cold woman ; he felt that it was impossible ; he felt that he must try it all the same. He wasn't going to give up. He ran violently in front of him through the black darkness. In the intense cold he became covered with sweat. He pitched right over the back of a cow that lay still and grunted for a moment in the darkness. His hands were cut by the frozen clods. He ran straight onwards for a long way. He didn't know how long he had been running when he seemed to come to himself ; then he remembered his fur-lined motor coat, that had cost thirty-four and a half guineas, and he went grimly back to the terrace to recover it, because he thought that one of the gardeners might steal it in the morning.

This showed that Mr. Pett was recovering his grip on himself. He was not going to give up. He was going to conquer, for he considered himself to be the most wonderful man in the world. He pressed his repeater and heard that it was a quarter-past twelve. The lights were out in the drawing-room, but on the bedroom floor many were still burning in an interrupted row. He slung his motor coat over his shoulder and marched into the house. When he came to his own bedroom he half opened the door, flung the coat in, and went on to Sergius Mihailovitch's room. He pushed the door open.

Sergius Mihailovitch was sitting sunk in an armchair

before the fire. He was wearing an old regimental coat of the Russian Guards, which he put on because he liked it, instead of a dressing-gown, in houses where he considered that his wardrobe would not be minutely observed by the servants. He was sitting looking straight in front of him, and when Mr. Pett burst in he exclaimed lazily :

“ Holloa ! ”

Mr. Pett cried : “ Look here, you’d better clear out of this.” Mr. Pett was wet all over with sweat, blood, and hoar-frost ; his eyes glared epileptically, his hot hands clenched and unclenched themselves. . . .

“ You clear out of this,” he repeated. “ I know things about you. You take my tip. Clear out ! I want you to.”

Macdonald rose lazily from his chair and went over towards his dressing-table. He was looking for his smelling bottle, because a sniff of very strong salts is an excellent thing for temporarily recovering a friend from a strong attack of liquor.

“ I know this,” Mr. Pett said : “ You’re Lady Aldington’s paid man. She keeps you. She paid sixty thousand pounds to your account. She’s your mistress. I know all that. I shall make use of it. You quit.”

Macdonald stood extremely still.

“ You’re starving your own wife,” Mr. Pett continued ; “ the Countess has told me so herself. She says you don’t give her any money. You take money from Kintyre when your own wife’s his mistress. Understand ? I shall use that too. Do you see ? I’ve got you. Quit ! Clear out of here. You’re not wanted.”

Macdonald said : “ What’s that you said Lady Aldington had paid ? . . . And then my wife ! . . . She said . . . She said that . . . ? ”

“ And the money Lady Aldington gives you,” Mr.

Pett continued, "you squander on a woman of the streets."

Suddenly Mrs. Pett was in the room. She stepped swiftly in front of her husband and kept her face towards Count Macdonald. In her little nightgown she appeared tiny and frail, like a black sparrow with a pink body. She did her best to cover her husband's body and to push him backwards out of the door. She was too agonised with terror to say anything at all, but her eyes implored Macdonald.

"Yes, get him out," Sergius Mihailovitch said, "or he will not live more than a minute."

"What?" Mr. Pett screamed from behind his wife's back. "You kill me? You're not the sort of man to kill me. I'm the sort of man to kill you. That's what I shall do. I shall kill you. First I shall blast your reputation, and then I'll have you killed."

"Oh, I don't mind threats," Macdonald said.

Suddenly Mrs. Pett exclaimed: "Don't be so pale, Sergius Mihailovitch. You're like chalk!"

And, indeed, in his grey military cloak with the cloth of gold on the shoulders, Macdonald resembled a cloaked statue. Even his hands were chalk-white.

"Get him away," he exclaimed, without any expression at all. "For God's sake get him away or I shall kill him. There is a revolver in this drawer."

And suddenly her tragic dignity deserted Mrs. Pett. She turned upon her husband, wound her fingers in his necktie, and pushed him backwards through the doorway. There was a little red foam between his lips, and Mrs. Pett resembled a dark, enraged coster girl who might have been punishing her bloke. She shut the door quickly behind her.

Macdonald remained standing perfectly still, so that he had the appearance of listening to sounds in the distance.

He took at last, absent-mindedly, a sniff from his smelling-bottle ; then he replaced it on the dressing-table and laid himself down once more in his long chair. He remained gazing at the fire. At last he said :

“ That’s the real dark forest—the heart of another, because of the wolves that there are in it.”

IV

THOUGH it was winter, and in the night there had been a very hard frost, on the next day the sun shone very brightly from rising to setting, and in all shadows there was a colour of blue because of the blueness of the sky. Macdonald and Kintyre rode over that crenellated and wrinkled Sussex country where in all the many small copses the oak leaves and the beech leaves were brown and thick beneath the sun. Twice even Kintyre pointed out a primrose flowering on the bank, well sheltered beneath the dead leaves. But it was obvious to Kintyre that Sergius Mihailovitch was not in the mood for talking. It took them an hour and a half to ride to Bodiam, where the otter hounds were, and in all that time Macdonald only put up one snatch of conversation. Just as they were going through Battle he asked suddenly :

“ Was that cheque that you paid into my account—a cheque for sixty thousand pounds—signed by you or by Lady Aldington ? ”

Kintyre looked at him rather apprehensively ; his sallow bearded face became even a shade more sallow.

“ My dear fellow,” he said, “ where the deuce do you think I could get sixty thousand pounds from—at a moment’s notice like that ? ”

Macdonald only answered “ Ah ! ” And they turned their horses down a steep hill that goes suddenly to the northward. Some time afterwards Sergius Mihailovitch asked :

"And how do you suppose that Pett got hold of that piece of information?"

Kintyre reflected for quite a long time; at last he said:

"Has Pett been talking to you? Has he been ragging you about it?"

Macdonald answered: "Of course he has," in a perfectly lifeless tone.

"Then I can only say," the Duke brought out cautiously, "that he must have guessed it; he is damnably sharp. Damnably!" He added after a time, "There isn't any other way. Not any! Of course I shouldn't talk, and nobody at the bank would talk. It's just possible that Emily may have told Mrs. Pett because they are great friends, and it's just possible that Mrs. Pett may have told her husband. It's just possible, but quite unthinkable."

"Oh, it's quite unthinkable," Macdonald repeated mechanically.

"But, of course, Pett," Kintyre said, "would be able to deduce it. He'd make a shot at it and take the risk. He knows your financial position pretty well, and he'd guess that I couldn't raise a huge sum of money like that at a moment's notice. So you can take my word for it that he just made a shot."

"Well, he was precious near my taking a shot at him," Macdonald said.

Again the Duke grew a shade paler, and once more he did not speak for quite a considerable time.

To Kintyre, Sergius Mihailovitch always appeared an extremely dangerous person. Kintyre was always thinking that Macdonald would burst out into a terrible fit of rage, and what he feared was not that Macdonald would call him out, but that he would demonstrate that Kintyre had been lacking somehow, somewhere in delicacy. And Kintyre had reasons for regarding himself as not the person with the cleanest of hands in the world. He couldn't possibly

consider himself as being straight in the absurd way that he considered Macdonald to be straight. Macdonald he couldn't in the least understand. He admired him, and he was afraid of him because he had met many Russians of good birth not one of whom he could have considered as reasonably honest men. Kintyre couldn't in the least understand where Macdonald had got his peculiar scrupulousnesses. He could only imagine that Macdonald must have been brought up in some extremely distant region of the Russian provinces, where there might have been some old marshal of nobility who had influenced him to a point of punctiliousness that must have vanished from the world perhaps a hundred years ago. And, of course, he could see that Macdonald, having been educated in his later years at Harrow, had taken seriously all the points of school-boy honour that he considered most English boys to regard as impracticable and too visionary for daily use. He himself at Winchester had been a most unspeakable little cad, and so he had found most of his comrades.

"It's all your confounded trying to be delicate." Kintyre at last faced the matter with a boldness of desperation. "It's not my fault. I should have been perfectly ready to have told you that the cheque was Emily's, but you've got a manner that absolutely prevents one talking to you. So that it's just delicacy that's landed you into what I can see to be a damnably coarse piece of blackmailing on the part of our friend Pett. But I am extraordinarily sorry if you're inconvenienced."

"I'm horribly inconvenienced," Macdonald said.

But they did not speak again until they came to Bodiam. Indeed, two minutes later they came upon a sort of a small squire in a grey woollen sweater, with hob-nailed boots and a light spear tipped with steel. And as this Mr. Monkhouse was slightly known to Kintyre, he walked beside the horses talking animatedly about a duty on hops. There

wouldn't be, he said, a single field in East Sussex that wouldn't be grubbed up if this damned Government didn't give them the duty that they wanted.

Bodiam was like a pageant. There was the immense castle like a background of stone to a group of people who were assembled on the banks of the slow Rother in broad green fields. There were the mottled hounds and quite a number of terriers. There was the bright sky, the silent glassy waters of the moat that reflected the naked branches of the trees all golden in the aching sunlight. And Macdonald heard a great many Sussex names and met a great many Sussex people. There were Monkhouses, and Vidlers, and Stringers, and Skinners, and Fletchers, and Venuses; and there was here and there a dash of scarlet and the short grey skirts of the women, who were all fair and tanned and loud-voiced. And they found an otter, and it went away downstream while they were trying to head it up; and there was a great deal of talk, but not very much splashing in the water, because the water was very cold. It was, indeed, not much more than a trial meeting to see whether they couldn't get an early winter hunt, for most of the otter hunting in these parts is carried on in the summer. Macdonald had to hear these facts many times over. They wanted him to get down from his horse and to run with them, but he wasn't much good at running, nor, for the matter of that, was Kintyre; but as they were both of them good horsemen, the pedestrians couldn't get anywhere that they couldn't go.

There was an odd incident of a dog otter in a mill-pond. It was lying in the middle of the water with its nose pushed up through a bunch of floating hay. They wouldn't even have noticed it at all except the hay kept still whilst the rest of the pond had a slow current. Someone observed the motionless patch, and there beneath it, sure enough, was the otter treading water. They disputed a good deal

about it, for not the oldest of them had ever heard the like. Some said that the otter did it to hide its muzzle, and others were of the opinion that it put its nose into the bunch of hay in order that the scent of the hay might prevent its own scent from coming over the water to the hounds. And one of these two theories they disputed and disputed until well into the afternoon, whenever they were not breathless with holloaing and beating the water.

But that was just an interlude that made no impression at all upon the mind of Sergius Mihailovitch. It seemed to be faint and distant, like looking at old-fashioned water-colour sketches, and Kintyre and Macdonald left the river about one o'clock, pretending that they wanted something to eat, though Macdonald couldn't have swallowed a crust. He took, instead, a great quantity of bad whisky at a little inn on the road, but because of the strength of his raging emotions it did not affect him any more than if it had been water.

The winter sun was settling slowly down to the horizon when they came within a mile of Aldington Towers. Having got through a gateway they were riding in a small copse where the woodmen had been lately at work on the under-wood, though they had all gone home because it was a Saturday. A robin was flitting along beside them, giving its long note of warning, and suddenly Macdonald said :

" You understand, I can have nothing more to do with you. Not ever. Never in this world."

" But, my dear fellow," Kintyre exclaimed . . .

Macdonald suddenly swung himself out of the saddle.

" It's no use," he said, " you can see that for yourself. It's utterly irrevocable. Go on. I am going to sit here. I've got to think this out. I'll have to tell you later whether I must ask you to leave the Galizian business as well, or whether I must leave it. I think one of us must,

but I haven't had time to grasp the situation." He was looking obstinately down on the ground.

"But, Sergius Mihailovitch," the Duke began; "but my good fellow . . ."

Macdonald looked up at him with blue eyes in a blood-shot setting.

"I don't bear you any ill will," he said. "I dare say you thought she was free. I don't know what the situation demands. I've only had time to hate the way it's been talked about. That's silly of me, but I'll let you know later if there's anything to say. Go away now or I think I shall have a fit."

He sat down on a faggot of cut brushwood, and Kintyre gazed down at him from the saddle.

Suddenly Kintyre raised his shoulders almost up to his ears and let them fall with an air of deep dejection. He caught up slowly the bridle of Macdonald's horse, which had stood perfectly still with its head hanging down. It was a very favourite mare of the Duke's that he had mounted Macdonald on for the day, and Kintyre did not like to think of its standing there when the coldness of the night was falling. It was extraordinarily still in the wood, and the slow footsteps of the horses as they went away crackled on the twigs like the report of fireworks.

On all the fallen beech leaves the red sunlight lay like blood and copper. The white round ends of sawn usepoles gleamed out of the green moss on their boles. All the under-wood of those cants was cut for a great distance, but the old timber and the fourteen-year trees that had been spared spread a network of branches all over the under-wood, and invested the whole place with a coloured twilight through which the shafts of light pierced from the level sun.

Macdonald sat perfectly still. He had on a long Russian riding-cloak, which he had taken because it might have turned cold, and it had not much mattered what he wore.

He sat motionless, and the robin, defiant, watchful, and yet loving company, approached almost near enough to peck his feet.

And then there came the sound of footsteps running. It was Emily Aldington, running as fast as she could downhill through the twilight. Her face was panic-stricken, and she had an old cloak lined with grey and white fur flying back from over her shoulders. She had been in the housekeeper's room when Kintyre had come to tell her that Macdonald was ill in the wood, and she had caught up the cloak, which was an old one belonging to the housekeeper herself. She had run and walked nearly a mile, and, although she was always in very good condition, she was out of breath with the hurry and the terror, for Kintyre considered that Macdonald had gone mad and his air had been full of alarm. Macdonald never turned his head to see who was coming, and this alarmed her still more. She cried out :

"My darling, you aren't dead?" For she thought he might have poisoned himself and was sitting there dead.

He looked up at her and exclaimed expressionlessly :

"No, I'm not even ill. I'm thinking about it all."

"Then if you are thinking," she said, "remember that I belong to you body and soul."

And suddenly kneeling upon the ground, she took hold of his hand and began to kiss it. He sat still, but at last he rested his hand motionlessly upon her hair. This was the first motion of affection or of trust that he had ever shown her, and her face became as happy as if she had been looking at little children playing, for she felt that this meant both affection and trust, and she desired to feel in herself nothing but humility, as if the woods were his, and the sky were his, and all of the world was his to do what he liked with. She wrapped his coat over his knees where it had fallen away, and, dropping

her own coat over herself, she sat still at his feet. It was the first happiness she had ever known, and she was perfectly happy ; she just wanted to sit still, she didn't doubt that his cloud of depression would pass away from him. She had nothing to do, she had nothing to think ; she had nothing left either to command or devise in the world. She could just sit still and look at the robin, and observe that the bright red of its breast merged into a sort of mistle-toe greenness of the wings, and she wondered where it slept at night, for as the darkness came down it fluttered away upwards amongst the indistinguishable boughs of the higher trees. And she wondered vaguely where all the beasts of the wood took refuge in the dark long nights, and what one would see if suddenly a bright light could be thrown upon them, or if one could see in the darkness little things, small birds, and rabbits, and the noisy rooks all in the darkness, that must seem warm because it was so black and so still.

Suddenly his hand moved with a resolute action, with a quick motion that she knew to mean he was coming back to life ; and suddenly she exclaimed :

“ We've found it, really.”

And he said : “ Yes ! yes ! The very centre of dark forest.”

V

MR. PETT inhabited one of those discreet houses of which there is a colony nestled away to the south-east of South Kensington station. In the tortuous and narrow streets of this district there is very little traffic, and in the resulting quietness Mr. Pett found that tranquillity of atmosphere which was necessary to his avocation as a Thinker. He might have been in a country village. His old house stood in a large garden that was completely surrounded with a high wall. Before the front door stood a gate with a grille, and this gate the servants could open from the kitchen by pressing a button. Mr. Pett believed very much in all labour-saving appliances. The house itself might have been built in 1820, but in the interests of hygiene and for the slaying of all insects as well as of all microbes, Mr. Pett had so filled up all interstices with white paint and white enamels that, in a winter twilight with the fire dancing, the aspect of the long, rather low, rooms was really very pleasant. All the tapestries were of blue curtain serge; on the walls there were many high art photographs of Mr. Pett, bearing inscriptions to the effect that they were respectfully presented by exclusive photographers. There were also many portraits of Mr. Pett's distinguished contemporaries, they too bearing evidence in the form of inscriptions that they were presented by the distinguished sitters. In the white wooden book-shelves were a great many books, modern editions

of classics, novels presented by their authors, modern scientific works, and books concerned with economics. So that, in his complacent moments, Mr. Pett could feel that he was really founding a family in an ancestral home, for there was none of his books and none of his pictures on the walls that did not give evidence of some distinguished association or another ; and since Mr. Pett ardently believed that wars were at an end, and that a new era had dawned, he could think contentedly that his children—for he was now sufficiently wealthy to consider the possibility of burdening himself with a family—might thank him for placing them when they came into existence amongst the aristocracy of the new era. Indeed, there was practically no one, whether it were Mr. Bernard Shaw, Mr. Galsworthy, Mr. H. G. Wells, or the President of the new founded British Academy, or Monsieur Anatole France, or Count Tolstoi, or the President of the Fabian Society, who was not represented in one form or another in Mr. Pett's residence. And Mr. Pett could quite justly think that he himself stood not in the least below the level of these founders of the Great New Things that would come.

In such a winter twilight Mr. Pett stood before his polished brass mantel-shelf, in the white room with the blue serge curtains ; pieces of wood burning in the fireplace sent out pleasant reflections that danced on the shiny white surface of the walls. Mr. Pett was talking energetically, and with a certain high spirit in the flow of his words. In the shadows close at his right hand sat Mrs. Pett ; in the shadows before him, the Marquis da Pinta and a Dom Crisostomo Carrasco, a gentleman who, although he was a Spaniard, was nevertheless the Marquis da Pinta's agent in Galizia. The Dom Carrasco was a little dark man. In the dancing light of the flames his face stood out from time to time, vivid but exhibiting a strained attention. He had a little, thin, black curly beard, and his eyes shone with

a deep, half-maniacal fury. He was of the Anarchist degenerate type, but he was filled with a fervent passion for Royalism and the Catholic Faith.

"A man like that ought to be killed!" Mr. Pett exclaimed.

"Yes, yes, he ought to be killed," the Marquis da Pinta repeated. "I will kill him myself when I am at liberty to do so. Every day I am practising with my sword. He has desecrated the memory of the great Dumas."

The Dom Carrasco leant forward in his armchair and exclaimed:

"Yes, yes, he ought to be killed." And his white fingers in the fire-light crawled like a bunch of sleepy, new-born snakes.

"It's not soon enough," Mr. Pett exclaimed, "to kill him in a duel after the counter-revolution. He ought to be killed at once, or at the very least as soon as the King is put on his throne."

"Yes, yes," Dom Carrasco exclaimed, "as soon as the King shall enjoy his own again."

Mrs. Pett said agonisedly: "But, for God's sake, be careful, Herbert!"

And Mr. Pett snarled at her sharply: "What do you mean?"

"It's exactly," Mrs. Pett said, "as if you were asking to have Count Macdonald murdered."

"No; I'm asking to have him executed," Mr. Pett said, "that's what I want. He ought to go out of the world sharply and quickly, and without any romance to leave a glamour round his name. He ought to be shot by order of a court-martial. That's it, he ought to be shot quickly, quietly, and efficiently, with no fuss about it."

"Yes, yes, quickly and quietly," Dom Carrasco muttered.

"But you can't really mean it, Herbert?" Mrs. Pett said. She appealed earnestly to the other two. "You

must understand, gentlemen," she said, "that my husband is only speaking figuratively. It's a common enough thing for him to say that traitors to the State should be executed. But he doesn't mean it literally. Count Macdonald can't be called a traitor to the State. He's only a gentleman of a different way of thinking from my husband."

The Marquis da Pinta barked out violently: "But he is a traitor to the State. He will soil the opening years of the new reign of the King by shedding blood. There must be no blood when the King ascends the throne. Besides, he has desecrated the memory of the great Dumas."

"You only got that idea of shedding blood from my husband," Mrs. Pett said. "It isn't your own idea."

Mr. Pett exclaimed violently: "Shut up, Anne." And then he squared his shoulders to deliver his philosophy. "You might say that I am expressing an old idea when I say that Sergius Mihailovitch ought to be put out of the way. You might say he deserves death because he is setting out to take life. That would be the old Hebraic shibboleth—an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, and death for him who deals death. But that is an exploded theory, though even under that old code Macdonald deserves death . . ."

Mrs. Pett exclaimed once more: "But Herbert . . ."

She was really very seriously concerned. She knew perfectly well that her husband was merely taking a dramatic pose. Really, he was only trying to discredit Macdonald. He hadn't the least intention or the least desire of having any life taken. But he had got upon that line of talk, and he stuck to it for the sake of dramatic effect. And she disliked this exceedingly, because she thought that these two gentlemen would consider her husband a confounded fool and a disagreeable sort of person, because they couldn't help knowing that Mr. Pett had paid his

court to Lady Aldington and that Macdonald was the preferred suitor.

She disliked thinking that these foreigners should consider her husband to be what she called a dirty little swine. She didn't consider that he really was this, but she knew that in these moments of tension he gave way to unworthy emotions. She had to consider her home, her children, and the reputation of her little clan, and these she was trying to protect. It never came into her head that these foreign gentlemen would take her husband seriously and, with his sanction, would attempt to murder Sergius Mihailovitch. That appeared to her an extravagant idea. People did not do these things.

"Even by the old code," Mr. Pett continued, "Macdonald is worthy of death in any honourable circle. He has taken money from the Duke of Kintyre as the price of his dishonour. In any decent society that would be judged worthy of death. He's taken money from Lady Aldington, who is his mistress. In any decent society that would be judged worthy of death."

"Certainly these things would be worthy of death," the Marquis da Pinta said.

"He has squandered Lady Aldington's money upon a common woman of the streets," Mr. Pett went on with his indictments. "He is what the French would call a *souteneur*. That alone is worthy of death."

"But, good God, Herbert," Mrs. Pett said, "you know perfectly well that all of these things are untrue!"

"I've had them all from his wife," Mr. Pett snapped back. "He has deserted his wife and left her to starve. That's enough to make any decent man want to shoot him."

"Certainly," Dom Carrasco said, "that's enough to make any decent man desire to shoot him. He is a blot upon the face of monarchy."

Mrs. Pett suddenly began to laugh. It appeared to her to be the only thing to do.

"You're all perfectly grotesque," she said ; "you seem to forget that this is the twentieth century. You're like a set of conspirators in an Italian mediæval town, and Herbert is like Henry II when he said to his courtiers : 'Will no one rid me of this pestilent priest ?' and so they went and murdered St. Thomas à Becket. I really wish you'd stop it, because if anybody should ever hear—at least it gives me the feeling—you really would appear rather discreditable."

A silence settled down upon the room ; the fire-light flickered ; the branches of a leafless laburnum tapped upon the window. Suddenly the door opened, and against the lighted hall there appeared the figure of one of Mr. Pett's efficient servants, and behind her that of the Countess Macdonald. Mrs. Pett sprang up quickly from her cane chair, and really running into the hall she prevented the Countess's entrance.

"Herbert's got some men on business," they heard her say, "let's go into the dining-room." Then the door closed.

Mr. Pett continued : "He merits death for many offences even under the old code. But I do not stand for anything old. I stand for the Great New Things that are coming. In the New Time there won't be any death penalty for the killing of a man. There won't be any death penalty at all, except for the one offence that this man has committed. Indeed, hardly anyone will kill a man, all the passions that lead to this being abolished by a wise government. But there is one crime that is unpardonable, that is, an attempt to kill New Ideas. That is unpardonable because it hurts not one man but the entire community, and not only the entire community but the entire State of which the symbol is the King. That is what this man

Macdonald has done for the counter-revolution. We had the New Idea that this should take place without any show of force or any danger of the shedding of blood, and to repair this offence there is no penalty but that of extinction. And this extinction should not take the form of execution with its forms and pomps, because that would draw attention to the man and his ideas. Nay, it should not even take the form of execution by court-martial. Some private person should be selected by the head of the State quickly and quietly to assassinate the wrong-doer. He shouldn't, indeed, even be formally informed that he is to assassinate the criminal. A wink or a nod from the head of the State ought to be sufficient. I hope you follow my line of reasoning ? ”

The Marquis da Pinta said : “ I follow it perfectly. Your logic is incontestable. We must put this man out of the way quickly and quietly.”

“ I will attend to its being done,” Dom Crisostomo Carrasco exclaimed ; “ you may depend upon me.”

Mr. Pett suddenly had a little moment of emotion.

“ But, good God,” he said, “ you don't suppose I'm in earnest ? You don't suppose that I really want Macdonald murdered ? ”

The Marquis da Pinta said : “ No, no, of course not,” in an official manner.

And Dom Carrasco repeated : “ I perfectly understand what you want done.”

“ But look here ! ” Mr. Pett said agitatedly. “ You quite understand that I don't want that. I strongly object to murder. That was only a theory.”

“ Oh, I perfectly understand Your Excellency,” Dom Carrasco said. “ It shall be all exactly as Your Excellency desired.”

“ That's quite certain ? ” Mr. Pett asked. “ You gentlemen are sometimes rather ready with the knife, I believe.”

"I should not think of letting a knife be used," the Marquis da Pinta said. "You seem to forget that I am a person of intelligence."

They began to talk about the affairs of the Galizian counter-revolution. They were prospering even beyond their anticipations. Operating from the Spanish border on the north-west of Galizia, Mr. Carrasco, who, for purposes of identification, was mounted on a white stallion that had one piebald mark like a diamond on its left haunch—Mr. Carrasco in three months had covered very nearly the whole of the provinces of Gallegos and South Galizia. The province of Batalha, where the population was really densest, since it contained two and a quarter of the three million Galizians, Carrasco could neglect, for that province would do pretty well what Mr. Macdonald—El Rey de Batalha—chose to command; and Carrasco himself had seen this Mr. Macdonald just before leaving for England, and Mr. Macdonald assured him that as far as he was concerned the counter-revolution might begin at any moment.

April, however, had been fixed for the date of the entrance into Flores, the capital. This was because the taxes of the country were collected and became due in May. That had been Macdonald's idea. By April the republic would have positively no money at all in its possession, and Mr. Dexter in his capacity of representative of the monied king of the United States had taken all the steps necessary to prevent the unfortunate republic from being able to borrow a penny from anywhere in the world. By April they simply wouldn't have a penny. The republic, seeing its doom approaching, had made a desperate attempt to raise extra personal taxes in November; but even at that, by the most unconstitutional methods, they hadn't been able to get together more than three thousand pounds, and the army hadn't been paid for six months. Thus, wherever

he had gone Carrasco had been treated by the population as a saviour. In many places he had made speeches in the market from the back of the white stallion. He had told the people that a reign of peace and plenty was coming for them ; he had said that he personally was ready to authorise them to pay no taxes for two whole years. At first he had had to do these things with some show of secrecy, but by the time he had reached Vila di Goya, a large town twelve miles distant from the capital, there hadn't any longer been the least need for concealment. He had addressed an immense concourse in the market-place, and then nearly nine thousand people had insisted on following him in his ride to Flores. Nay, they had even insisted on forcing him up to the very doors of the Palace of the Annunciation, where the republican ministry was sitting ; and they had insisted on his entering and confronting the ministers. By that time there must have been from thirty to forty thousand men howling and gesticulating outside the long old palace of white stone. They were crying out that they would tear everyone of the ministers limb from limb if the little finger nail of Carrasco were so much as tapped in an unfriendly manner. Carrasco himself hadn't in the least desired to interview the ministers, but he described how he had found them, sitting at a long table covered with a green cloth—fourteen professors, journalists, and tradesmen, all rather fat, all in black frock coats, and with extremely pale faces. Mr. Carrasco had remained looking at them for a minute or so in silence. Then he had said :

“ Well, gentlemen, I have nothing to say to you.”

The Minister of Agriculture, a Jewish money-lender, was the only one of the ministers who had kept his head. He said to Carrasco with a jaunty manner :

“ Senhor, we hear that you have come to every Galizian to offer him thirty-six thousand peccadi and no taxes for

two years. For myself and my colleagues I beg to say that we shall be very happy to accept this offer when the time comes."

And all the ministers at the table had muttered indistinguishable words, with the exception of the President of the Republic, a fat author—the only author in Galizia. This gentleman had violently struck the table with his fist, and had exclaimed :

"May God curse this day when I hear Galizians ready to sell their country !"

Mr. Carrasco had calmly opened the window and, stepping out on to the balcony, had addressed the immense crowd that was outside. He had said :

"My brothers, go home quietly, the reign of peace and plenty is at hand. For the present have patience, pay no taxes, but live at peace one with the other. When the sun comes—for it is winter—I pledge you my word, I Crisostomo Carrasco, that all I have promised you shall take effect, but for the present be peaceful."

He commented to Da Pinta : "They are an astonishing people, your Galizians. At my words they began to go away like trained horses, each returning to his private affairs, so that you would have said that in forty minutes there had never been any hint of disorder at all in Galizia. And for myself, if I might advise you, I should set aside a sum of twenty-eight thousand pounds—two thousand for each of these ministers, and then bargain about bribing them to desert the President."

"The President is a gallant man," the Marquis da Pinta grumbled. "He is the vice-president of the Society of Worshippers of Dumas. He will never desert his post ; that is what comes of studying this admirable author."

"And if you will take my advice," Mr. Carrasco continued, "you will string out the negotiations about this bribe to the cabinet for as long as you can, for this country is ripe

for the revolution. But we shall have two months to wait until we shall be ready, and in these two months the ministers might do something if they had some money in their hands. At the present moment the Minister of Finance has not one cent, and the man who sells him beans for his stew will no longer give him credit. I might have declared the revolution a week ago from that balcony, but I had no organisation behind me, and it might have confused the issue, for some of the soldiers are still loyal to the republic."

Mr. Pett exclaimed: "What more could you ever want? It is really all finished. It is foolish to sit here and wait any more."

"I do not know so much about that," Dom Carrasco answered, "for there is still in this matter a hard core of republican sentiment, and they are very obstinate men. I agree that this Count Macdonald is worthy of death, but at the same time I personally shall be glad of his battleships, for I am certain that without them there would be much shedding of blood. This republican core consists almost entirely of soldiers, and they are well armed and very ferocious, whilst the rest of the population has only a few daggers and some old swords. So that unless the warships of this traitor, whose name I spit upon, should be there to over-awe these republicans, I think there might very well be much bloodshed, for on both sides this people is a very determined one."

Mr. Pett immediately began violently to harangue the Dom Carrasco. But although the Dom Carrasco adored Mr. Pett as if he had been a god, and was perfectly ready to assassinate Count Macdonald because Count Macdonald had annoyed Mr. Pett, he nevertheless stuck quite firmly to his opinion that battleships were necessary. Dom Carrasco adored Mr. Pett because Da Pinta had assured him that this gentleman had started the counter-revolution, and to Dom Carrasco to start a counter-revolution appeared

to be a thing so meritorious and so splendid that he was ready to put his head under Mr. Pett's heel at any moment and in the dustiest of places, and he always called Mr. Pett "Your Excellency." He was the son of a shoemaker in Toboso, where his name is a very old one, and he was ready to go at any moment to his death in support of a legitimate king or of the Holy Sacraments of the Church.

A furious wrangling immediately began between all these people.

In the next room the Countess Macdonald was saying to Mrs. Pett :

"Who has Pett got with him? I want to speak to him urgently."

Mrs. Pett trembled a little ; she was rather exhausted and very nervous, and she dreaded immensely that in some way the Countess should discover the secret of the revolution and by betraying it to the press should ruin its chances of success. The gentlemen in the next room were raising their voices very loudly, and although exactly what they said could not be heard through the folding doors, she very much dreaded that her husband might raise his voice so high as to become comprehensible. She said :

"Let us go upstairs to my bedroom ; there's a much better fire there."

"Oh, the fire here is quite good enough. I prefer to be here ; besides, you can always put some more wood on." And this the Countess did herself, though she occupied a minute or so in blowing it with the brass bellows afterwards.

"I want to speak to Pett at once," she said. "It's urgent."

"But you've seen Herbert every day at least once until last week," Mrs. Pett said. "Why, you saw him last night after we had got back from Aldington Towers."

"But I've discovered a new villainy," the Countess said. "It's very urgent."

"You've discovered a new villainy every day for the last two months," Mrs. Pett said; and she began to get angry. "Haven't you got villainies enough together to suit you?"

"But this is the end of everything," the Countess said.

"It's always the end of everything, you know," Mrs. Pett answered.

"Do you know what Macdonald is up to?" The Countess faced her squarely. "Do you know what I've found out? He's getting up a counter-revolution in Galizia."

Mrs. Pett only said: "Ah!" And she put her hand upon her throat because her heart was fluttering so wildly. She looked at the sideboard and saw the bread-knife on it. She looked at the door and saw that the key was on the outside. In any case she was determined that this woman should not go out of her house with this secret.

"I am going to stop that," the Countess said. "I am going to stop the counter-revolution altogether. I was determined to find out what Macdonald was up to. I sent information to all the newspapers that he was attempting to get together a great opera syndicate. That was what you told me. And letters have come to all the papers from all the singers that you mentioned, utterly denying that they have had anything to do with any syndicate."

"You've utterly spoiled the plan," Mrs. Pett said faintly.

"That's what I was trying to do," the Countess Macdonald answered. "But the plan never existed. You were lying to me when you said that it did."

She spoke very slowly, and Mrs. Pett realised that she was being treated to one of the Countess's fits of what she called icy contempt. And Mrs. Pett determined to attempt so to enrage the Countess that she would make an attempt to strike her. Mrs. Pett in her educational thoroughness

had learnt ju-jitsu. She had learnt it almost perfectly, and she imagined that if the Countess should attempt to strike her, she could throw her so scientifically that she would be laid up with concussion of the brain for at least six weeks. And although Mrs. Pett felt herself to be in an evil dream, the Countess who was one of their oldest friends, by haunting her home day in, day out, for the last three months had become such a figure of nightmare that it seemed appropriate enough, and Mrs. Pett was prepared to do anything in the world to prevent her husband's scheme from being ruined.

"Yes," the Countess said, "I've got all the letters drafted ready to post to the papers."

Mrs. Pett said, without raising her voice :

"The only thing to do with a woman of your description is to lie to her."

"But you didn't do it cleverly enough," the Countess exclaimed triumphantly. "I've done you, you see. I went round this morning to one of Sergius Mihailovitch's women—that person calling herself di Pradella. And what do you think that infernal villain had told the girl? Nothing less than that she had nothing whatever to do with separating me from him. So when I told her it was an infamous lie . . ."

"But it was perfectly true," Mrs. Pett said, "it was you who were lying."

"Haven't I the right to lie?" the Countess said. "Hasn't my home been broken up? Hasn't . . ."

"Oh, we've heard all that before," Mrs. Pett said. "So you lied to that poor girl? And I suppose if you told her that she was the absolute cause of your quarrel with Macdonald she'd at once be so shocked as to tell you anything that you asked?"

"That's exactly what happened," the Countess answered triumphantly.

"How could you do such a thing?" Mrs. Pett said. "How could you lead that poor innocent girl to betray her benefactor! It is the worst thing that I have heard of you."

The Countess suddenly went swiftly past Mrs. Pett. "I am going to tell your husband exactly what I think of him," she said.

Mrs. Pett gave a sigh of relief. In the next room there were, at any rate, three men.

The Countess threw open the drawing-room door. She switched on the lights, and all three men appeared blinking uneasily in the white room with the blue curtains. The Countess surveyed them with what she called looks of flashing scorn. She was dressed all in black, because she had come to do a deed of denunciation. She pointed her hand dramatically at Mr. Pett.

"Traitor!" she did her best to hiss.

Mr. Pett had not yet got over the sudden turning up of the light, and the only thing that he could do was to giggle rather idiotically. He grasped, however, what had happened quite quickly. He had realised that Her Excellency was certain to make the discovery sooner or later.

"Traitor to the cause!" the Countess said. "Traitor to Socialism! Traitor to all your old friends! Double traitor to me! I have got all the letters ready addressed to all the papers telling them what a dastardly traitor you are."

Mr. Pett chirped with a cheerful intonation: "They won't put them in, you know."

"Then if they won't," the Countess said, "I'll get the whole infamous story printed in a pamphlet."

"I don't believe you'll be able to get it printed," Mr Pett said.

The Countess sneered: "Oh, I can keep within the law of libel; I've studied it."

"I wasn't thinking of the law of libel, I was thinking of the Printers' Trades Union. And I have taken precious good care that the Printers' Trades Union won't print anything that will damage the counter-revolution. I've promised them a special law enacting that every printer of Galizia shall be paid much better money and work much shorter hours than even that Union could ever get in England."

"What an infamous scoundrel you are!" the Countess said. "And what an infamous state of things you disclose!"

"Oh, that's only Socialism," Mr. Pett said. "Socialism logically and efficiently carried out. There's not a single Union Printer in England that hasn't had notice not to print anything dangerous about Galizia. There's not a paper in London that dare print it, because it would throw it's composing room into chaos in a minute. The subject is absolutely dead. You won't be able to get a word said about it, even in the Radical papers. That's the efficient way these things are done. Of course, you may find a small non-Union printer who will set up the pamphlets for you, but I doubt if he could get his machining done for him. You've no idea of what a splendid censorship the Union can set up."

"My God," the Countess exclaimed, "I should like to tear your traitorous tongue out! I think you are the worst devil of them all in the gigantic conspiracy there is against me and my wrongs. It isn't only that you have betrayed all your friends! It isn't only that you are reactionary! It isn't only that you are betraying Society! It isn't only that you are a remorseless villain murdering the New Thought that you pretended to advocate! You wolf in sheep's clothing!"

Mr. Pett, who had become rather white, said: "Leave it at that, will you?"

"Oh, I'll leave it at that," the Countess said. "There's plenty more to go on with. That is enough to start your miserable little blood-worm of a conscience gnawing inside you. You won't sleep very well, now I've pointed out to you what an odious object the world considers you. . . . And then I come to your infamous treacheries to myself. You pretended to be my friend, and you have sold me to Macdonald. It's you who've acquiesced in all I said of him. You believed me when I said that he took money of Kintyre as the price of his own dishonour! You believed me when I said that he took money of his mistress to give to his creature! You believed me when I said that he had deserted me and left me to starve until now the laws of my country have forced him to give me the pittance that is my due!"

"Oh, so you've got your decree of restitution?" Mr. Pett said cheerfully.

"Every paper in the land," the Countess answered, "echoed yesterday with the story of my wrongs. I didn't leave anything out that I could get in."

"Oh, you couldn't get much into a petition for decree of restitution," Mr. Pett said.

"I've got enough," the Countess answered. "You should have seen the placards yesterday. There wasn't one that didn't have 'Russian Count' or 'Society Scandal' on it."

"I'm glad I was in the country," Mr. Pett answered. "Macdonald's the noblest and finest soul I ever came across, and you aren't fit to breathe the air on the same globe with him."

Mr. Pett glanced rather nervously at the two gentlemen from the Peninsula. For the moment he had forgotten himself, but Mrs. Pett said:

"Thank you, Herbert. That was very good of you, Herbert, to do yourself credit."

The Countess cast what she would have called a look of contempt one after the other at all the faces before her.

"Then you are all in this disgusting conspiracy?" she said. "I wonder if any of you can sleep at night? But I suppose you can. You are that sort of toad."—She addressed Mr. Pett directly. "That's what you are," she said. "A toad. Macdonald is a viper, but he's such a fool that he doesn't know what he's doing. You know better. That's what makes you a toad. Something noxious! Something filthy! You know all those facts about Macdonald, and yet you associate with him! My God! I shouldn't wonder if you used them for your own ends! I shouldn't wonder if you used them to blackmail him!"

Mr. Pett stood perfectly still for a moment or so. His face became rather puffy, and then suddenly he dropped on to the floor. There was a good deal of confusion. Mrs. Pett screamed out, and the dinner-gong rang outside, and the next moment the servant came in and announced, as she had been bidden to do:

"His Grace the Duke of Kintyre."

Mrs. Pett and no less than eight efficient servants were attending to the necessities of Mr. Pett, who lay quite still. The two dark gentlemen from the Peninsula removed themselves unostentatiously from the house, and Mrs. Pett, looking up from above the form of her husband, which resembled that of a drowned man to whom they were applying resuscitatory methods with a quiet discipline, remarked to Kintyre:

"You'd better take the Countess into the dining-room."

They were no sooner in that room than the Countess remarked with an expression of triumphant joy:

"Didn't I do that well?"

Kintyre reflected for a moment. "I don't know what you've done," he said. "But poor Pett faints very

easily when he's excited. And if you didn't do any more than make him faint, I don't think it's much of an achievement for a woman of your power."

"Well, I told him he was a blackmailer," the Countess said.

"That was decidedly considerate," Kintyre exclaimed.

"And I told him," the Countess answered, "that I was going to blow on the whole show of the Galizian counter-revolution."

"That's quite a considerate proceeding too," the Duke remarked.

"I shall go," the Countess said, "to the city of Flores and denounce the whole scheme to the Republican Ministry."

"That would be quite a good thing to do," Kintyre said, "except that they know all about it already."

"I don't believe it," she said.

"Well, you needn't," he answered. "I dare say a trip to Flores wouldn't do you any harm. But you won't really gain anything by it."

"I shall stop Sergius Mihailovitch's little game!" she exclaimed.

"Oh no, you won't," he answered, "because the poor ministry, like me and unlike you, haven't got any money."

"That's a cool thing to say," the Countess said. "You know very well . . ."

"If you're going to say," Kintyre interrupted, "that owing to the infamous desertion of you by Macdonald you're starving and penniless, you may as well save yourself the trouble. I know perfectly well that you've got plenty of money saved up. Plenty of money! And that Sergius Mihailovitch is paying you his income from the Russian Government through a third person."

The Countess smiled: "I'm giving him a pretty good dance for his money," she said. "Don't you think so?"

"Oh, I think you've done quite enough," Kintyre answered. "I should advise you to drop it now."

The Countess did what she would have called starting. "Do you dare to say that?" she said. "You!"

He reflected for just a minute, and then said cautiously: "My dear Margaret, I really think the time has come to drop it. You have, in fact, to drop either it or me. Do you understand?"

She surveyed him hardily and ironically for several minutes.

"Which do you think I'll drop?" she asked.

"I guess," he answered, cynically too, "it's just a toss up. On the one hand, you've got the chance of making yourself a little hell upon earth to half a dozen people. That's a very pleasant job. You're having the time of your life, I know."

"I'm not denying it," she answered.

"And, on the other hand," the Duke continued, "you've got a lover with a strawberry-leaved coronet. That's gratifying to your pride. Enormously gratifying!"

"I'll agree," she answered, "if you put husband instead of lover."

"I've never said I'd be your husband," Kintyre said. "I've said I'd give you what you wanted. You know perfectly well I can't possibly afford to marry you if you don't behave yourself. I don't say I shall if I can, but the position is perfectly simple."

"Oh, the position is perfectly simple," the Countess laughed at him. "If you don't marry me SerSius Mihailovitch won't get his divorce."

"If you play old billy any more with Sergius Mihailovitch's schemes," the Duke said, "I can't possibly afford to marry you, because I shall drop such a lot of money. So that really it depends whether you prefer the chance of

making yourself a beastly nuisance to the chance of the coronet that you want. It's perfectly simple."

"Oh, it's perfectly simple!" the Countess echoed.

"I didn't come here to see you," Kintyre continued. "I came here to address an observation to Mr. Pett, but I may as well tell you that until these things are entirely settled I'm not going to come and see you again."

She seemed for a moment to drop him out of her observation and to be reflecting aloud.

"So the excellent Mr. Pett," she said, "*has* been trying to blackmail Macdonald by means of the information I gave him? And you have come here with the intention of horse-whipping Mr. Pett?"

"It's only a dog-whip," the Duke said mildly.

"Yes, I saw it in the hall," she answered. Then she exclaimed, "And you tell me that I didn't do it well!"

"But it was so jolly easy," the Duke remonstrated mildly.

"It doesn't matter whether it was easy or difficult," she said. "The point was to hit as many persons as possible with one shot. And I've done that."

"You've done that almost too well," the Duke exclaimed. "You've hit me too."

"Oh, I know all about that," the Countess answered. "The amiable Mr. Pett has told Sergius Mihailovitch that I told him that you paid Sergius Mihailovitch in order to be allowed to make love to me. And that poor twopenny-halfpenny fool of a Sergius Mihailovitch has told you that he won't speak to you again. I know about the creature's muddled brain-works. And, of course, it's hit you remarkably hard. I meant it to. I know the silly way you adore Sergius Mihailovitch, and I always wanted to detach you from him. I guess I've done that."

"I don't know so much," the Duke said.

"But you're passionately in love with me," she remarked.

"Now, am I?" the Duke said reflectively.

"Oh yes, you are," she said, with assurance. "You can't keep your eyes off me. You don't know how to talk, but if you could talk you'd say that you are fascinated by me as you would be by a snake."

"I mayn't know how to talk," Kintyre said, "but I can put it better than that. Did you ever see a courtship of spiders? The female always eats the male, you know."

The Countess merely answered: "All right. Put it how you like."

"Well then, good-bye," the Duke said.

She looked at him with surprise. "You don't mean to say you're afraid of being eaten?" she asked.

"Oh, I'm not in the least afraid of being eaten," he answered, "but I'm enormously afraid of treating Sergius Mihailovitch dishonourably. If you can't put me into a position to treat him honourably, I've done with you."

"Well, state your terms," she said.

"The position is perfectly plain," he answered. "If you don't make it possible for me to marry you, I've got to drop you. I've got to drop you altogether. I couldn't possibly make you my mistress . . ."

"You couldn't possibly ever do that," she said.

"That's as it may be," he answered. "But I couldn't possibly do it if you were still the wife of Macdonald. That's the way he looks at it. I can't even come and philander with you as I have been doing."

"That's the way he looks at it," she mocked him with what she would have called a fine scorn.

"That's the way he looks at it," the Duke said seriously. "I didn't look at it in that way until just now. But I see he's perfectly right. He can't have me philandering with his wife. I did it in order to help him. But I see that it was a sort of suspect—an unpleasant position."

"You admire Sergius Mihailovitch as much as that?" she asked.

"I admire him as much as you can possibly think," he answered. "And I may as well add, because you'll understand that much better, that he also carries a heavy financial backing from me. I don't want to lose my money."

"Oh, you think I shall understand that better than the other?" she said. "But I don't. You're a bad hat, but you're such a sentimental fool that when you come into contact with a man as honourable as Sergius Mihailovitch is, you simply go a silly mucker over him."

"Well, you can put it like that," the Duke answered. "I don't care how you put it. I didn't want to marry you. I never promised to marry you. What I promised to do was to give you exactly what you wanted."

"What's that but marrying me?" she said.

"Oh, there are much better things than marrying me," he answered. "If you married me you could only monkey with my life and make me miserable. And I'm a pretty tough customer. You wouldn't really like that in the end. The job you want is that of torturing a whole lot of miserable weak things that can't hit back. You ought to manage an orphan school. That's the job you want, and that's the job I shall probably find for you one of these days. You want to torture easily on a wholesale plan. So there you have it. If you'll divorce Sergius Mihailovitch I'll marry you."

"I shall never do that," she answered.

"Then you're an entirely ruined creature," he said gravely. "You're done. You're gone out. One of these days you'll come crawling to me, and you'll ask me to give you what you want."

The Countess laughed. "You're like a stage prophet," she said. "I've got the whole lot of you."

"Oh no, you haven't!" he answered. "Your goose

is cooked. I tried to give you your chance. But you have lost it."

"I shall leave for Flores to-morrow morning," the Countess said.

"Well, that will be quite pleasant," the Duke answered. "The press telegrams are entirely suppressed, so we shan't be troubled with you for at least a month. That'll be a relief, for you are an extremely agitating person."

She stood still and let him look at her. She would have called it exercising her full power of fascination.

"I wish you'd divorce Macdonald and let me marry you," he said slowly.

She only laughed.

"Take the chance," he urged.

She laughed once more.

"You're doing it awfully well," he said. "Mucking up your life and my life and all the other lives. But is it really worth it? Absolutely all you'll get out of it will be that you will be able to go to poor Miss Dexter and tell her all about it with extreme detail, and then say, 'Didn't I do that well?' Don't muck up everything for the sake of this silly little bit of play-acting."

"You've had your answer," the Countess said.

The Duke slowly shrugged his shoulders up to his ears in his habitual attitude, which expressed deep dejection.

"You understand," he said, "that if you don't divorce Sergius Mihailovitch he will divorce you. You seem to forget that all this time he is a Russian subject."

The Countess only laughed. "There isn't any divorce in Russia," she said.

"Oh, but there is," he answered. "Don't you understand that the Czar can dissolve any marriage by a ukase?"

"Sergius Mihailovitch would never do it," she answered contemptuously.

"Oh, but he would," the Duke said. "You've for-

gotten Emily Aldington. You've played the game too long. You trusted too much in his sense of responsibility to you. Now he's got a responsibility to Emily Aldington. He'll do everything that he can for her—as much as he ever tried to do for you. You forced him into her arms. You let it go too long."

"He'll never do it," she said stubbornly.

"Then if he won't do it," Kintyre answered, "it will be done for him. By a week from to-morrow you'll be an unmarried woman."

"He'll never do it," she repeated.

"My dear Margaret," he answered, "do believe there are interests more powerful even than Sergius Mihailovitch's will, and they're all at work here. The American financial interests want it. I want it. The Grand Duke wants it. The Grand Duke has only got to write the ukase, or to dictate it to a secretary along with orders for Court balls, and the Emperor will sign it as if it were a receipt for a pound of fish. Don't you understand that it's all over with you? All those people want to be rid of you. You haven't a friend in the world except for me. I shouldn't have *let* you divorce Sergius Mihailovitch if I hadn't wanted to make it as easy for you as possible. The Grand Duke would have written that ukase months ago if Sergius Mihailovitch hadn't begged him not to, and if I hadn't supported Sergius Mihailovitch. I've offered you a sporting chance, because you're a sporting woman. You've refused it, but I will make you the offer again. Divorce Sergius Mihailovitch and I'll marry you."

She remained silent for quite a long time. Her nostrils were working up and down. And then she said slowly:

"You're the most sentimental ass that I've ever come across. You pretend to be a bad hat. But I don't believe you ever had the spirit to commit a crime, or so much as to leave a woman in the lurch until she was sick of you. You

don't want to leave me in the lurch. But you can. I am sick of you."

"Oh no, you're not," he said. "You're only acting."

"That'll do," she answered. "You seem to forget that I have principles. You seem to forget that all my life I have stood for Socialism and trust in the people. Do you think it is I that will join in this atrocious plan for erecting a reactionary government—and making money out of it? Do you think it is I that will take reactionary money?"

"You're taking money from the Russian Government now," the Duke said.

"That's only plundering the Egyptians," she answered. "I am going to hand all the money I have got to the Galizian Republic to buy powder for the troops. I shall ruin Macdonald's vile scheme in that way. I am not done with. Don't think it. I was born a friend of progress."

"No, it was Sergius Mihailovitch who made you one," Kintyre answered.

"And whoever may fall away, that is what I shall remain."

"Well, you're an extraordinary figure!" the Duke said.

"You speak about Socialism. But did you ever reflect that that amiable party, however stupid it may be, however detrimental it may be, yet contains a few honest people—people with principles? You don't want to identify yourself with people who have principles. They're not your sort. *Can't* you drop this play-acting and be a human being? *Can't* you let your heart act at all?"

"No," she said. "Not ever. I shall never change."

"But can't you," he said, "consider that I love you passionately, and, for the matter of that, that you love me? Isn't there any way out of it?"

"No, none," she answered. "I am absolutely firm."

"Torture!" the Duke said. "Well, you may torture

a few people, but you'll never torture anybody as you torture yourself. And for the sake of acting ! But you haven't got a solitary soul left in the world to act to—no one except yourself. You'll go on acting to little Miss Dexter for a little while. And then I shall marry little Miss Dexter because I want some money, and then—you'll have no one in the world to act to but yourself. Not a single solitary soul ! It's rather pitiful, isn't it ? ”

She held her head erect and looked into his eyes. “ No one will ever be able to say——” she began.

“ No one will ever say anything,” Kintyre exclaimed “ No one will ever think of you. We shall go on our way—all sorts of ways, and you'll be entirely forgotten. Who's going to think of you ? There won't be anybody to do it. You're nothing. You're nobody. And yet you might be rather a lot. Why don't you chuck it and come over to us ? ”

“ So that no one will ever be able to say,” she answered, “ that I did it.”

PART V

I

THE steam yacht *Esmeralda* got up its anchors in the harbour of Batalha at a quarter to one in the morning. Macdonald and Emily Aldington remained upon the captain's bridge. There were besides them upon the ship Mr. and Mrs. Pett, Mr. and Miss Dexter, the King of Galizia and the Queen-Mother, who, however, was so incapacitated by sea-sickness as to amount to nothing at all, and the chauffeur, Mr. Salt, as well as the King's most powerful car. There was, moreover, a pope who was to marry Lady Aldington to Macdonald as soon as they could touch any kind of Russian territory. The pope was a fine, fat man, with very long hair and very fine curled beard; but he was so usually drunk that it was very difficult to do anything with him.

Indeed, it was very largely this pope who was responsible for the delay they had had in getting off.

Kintyre had spoken quite correctly when he had told the Countess Macdonald that Macdonald, as soon as the way out was pointed out to him, would act entirely in the interest of Emily Aldington. But he had even underestimated the vigour with which Macdonald would act, for no sooner did the idea of the ukase really formulate itself in Macdonald's head than, within half an hour, he had sent at least four telegrams, the one to the Grand Duke, another to the Czar himself, a third to the Russian Minister of Cults, and a fourth to the Metropolitan of Moscow. And within six

hours he had received a telegram from the Grand Duke assuring him that the ukase would be granted by ten o'clock of the following morning, and that it would reach the Russian Embassy in London within the week. That was in the beginning of March. And indeed the imperial ukase, dissolving *ab initio* the marriage between the Count and Countess Macdonald, did reach London within the seven days, and three days before Lady Aldington's decree against her husband was made absolute. There appeared therefore to be no obstacle. But there was. For upon going to the Embassy Macdonald found that he couldn't have the necessary copy of the ukase without paying down fees to the amount of eight hundred and ninety-seven pounds, two shillings.

He hadn't at the moment really any money at all. He had exhausted the last of his own cash on the telegrams to Russia, which, because they had had to be very long and very explicit, had cost him a great deal of money. And he really couldn't for the life of him see how he was going to raise anything like eight hundred and ninety-seven pounds, two shillings. He was reaching that period of the quarter when he began to visit Messrs. Zimmermann with his dressing-cases and more portable valuables.

(It is impossible to represent Sergius Mihailovitch as being in any way rational or coherent in his idealism. All that can be said is that he was consistently an idealist. He had been unreasonably generous in his treatment of his wife up to this point. Now it was as if he had simply switched on to a current of idealism entirely different in quality. Until then it was as if he had tried to drift along the lines of the highest principles. But the revelations of Mr. Pett) had extraordinarily hardened and extraordinarily embittered him. It does not very much matter what crisis of psychology or of depression he went through immediately after Mr. Pett's attempt at blackmail. The

psychological bitternesses of men of a sensitive nature are most often experiences similar—as Macdonald had said—to those which take place in a fever. They are shapes horribly vivid for the time ; then they go out.

For many hours, for many days after Mr. Pett's revelations, Sergius Mihailovitch remained in such a fever. The odd thing was—so horrible is the approach of any kind of blackmailer—that Sergius Mihailovitch for the time being really felt that he was the type of man that Mr. Pett had accused him of being. He couldn't get away from the feeling that if the whole world considered that he was a *souteneur*, that he had taken money from Kintyre and from Lady Aldington, that he had left his wife to starve—that if the whole world said these things of him they must be true. So for several days he felt that he couldn't lift up his head, that he couldn't look anyone in the face. To transact any kind of business, whether the affairs of the Resiliens Company or those of ordering ammunition for the Galizian counter-revolution, became extraordinarily painful for him. He imagined, too, that all to whom he spoke were despising him ; he imagined even that Mr. Salt, the King's chauffeur, despised him, and that so did the King himself.

It was, indeed, from that rather absurd boy that the light really came in the end. The consolations of Lady Aldington did really very little for him, because he felt that she was too much interested in him for her moral upholding to have much value. She said that he was in the right in everything ; but that was what she would say.

But one day he told the young King that he thought it would be better if he gave in his resignation as director of the counter-revolution, and this produced an extraordinary storm of feeling on the part of that loyal boy. For whilst he had been under Macdonald's tutelage, Pedro II had become as it were very much younger, very much more naïve, and very much more awkwardly gracious.

Dom Pedro, in realising that he was really a king, had become very much more afraid of making mistakes, for he took his responsibilities with great seriousness.

Thus at the very first hint of Macdonald's resignation he burst out with a sort of incredulous rage :

"Show me the man who has dared to breathe a word against you, and with my own hands I will kill him ! For how shall I be fitted to reign without your guidance ? And how shall I be able to do my duty to my people if I attempt to reign without it ? There is nothing whatever that any man dare say against you. I say that, Dom Pedro. In all these particular matters I have the right to say that, for if I do not yet stand upon Galizian soil, nevertheless in this particular matter by the grace of God I am the head. And it is certain that God, who desires my restoration, would not have given me a guide who was a man of dishonour. I know all these circumstances from the first to the last, and by my race, my tradition, and my ancestry I am very well fitted to judge in these things. And when it comes to my heart, my heart tells me . . . my heart tells me . . ." And at that point the boy began to blubber.

They were in the long drawing-room of the house in Portman Square, and the Queen-Mother at the other end of it was knitting and talking as usual to two French duchesses and two English priests.

"Don't you understand ? " the King said passionately. "I want to be a king again, and I can't without you. I don't feel I should have the right without you. Now then, isn't that enough for you ? It's your duty, I tell you. Now then ; you've got to do it ! You hear ? "

The King had always struck Sergius Mihailovitch as being extraordinarily pure—as stupid as you like, but wonderfully pure in heart. And that speech could not but wake him out of his lethargy. Indeed, the whole

atmosphere of that lazy Galizian Court in the London drawing-room was, for him, singularly sustaining. They trusted him so entirely. The Queen would knit away and ask for news, and go on knitting as if it were none of her business, because she was entirely in his hands. The English priests would look at him with the round eyes of admiration which they reserved for the saviour of the Church, though oddly enough he was by upbringing an Old Believer. The French duchesses would hardly notice his existence, which was the greatest compliment they could have paid him, since it showed him that they considered him to be one of their men. So that Sergius Mihailovitch suddenly squared his shoulders and said :

“ Very well.”

Then he had had to become a man of action, he had had to regard himself as one of that corporate body of them all. He had to do his best for the lot of them.

And he even felt a certain pleasure in brutally holding the pistol of the ukase at his wife's head. To a rather astonished Mr. Buss he said simply :

“ You've put me at the end of my tether. I'm not going to let the Countess divorce me ; I've divorced her. She can have the money that I agreed to let her have, but that's all. You have got to draw up an agreement that will satisfy my solicitors. If you don't, there won't be any agreement. The Countess's money is safe. That's an end of it.”

To Kintyre he had said that he accepted Kintyre's word, that there was nothing wrong between him and the Countess. And there was an end of it. To Lady Aldington he said that he was going to marry her as soon as he had the ukase in his hands. To Mrs. Pett he wrote that he was ready to forget what her husband had said. He would take it that Pett had been either mad or drunk. For himself he expected Pett to write to him a letter stating

that he knew perfectly well that Macdonald had had no money from anybody, that he had not deserted his wife, and that his conduct had been entirely correct in every particular. Mr. Pett came to see Macdonald at the garage. He tried to get out of writing a letter, but Macdonald, who didn't care twopence about the matter one way or the other, simply held him firmly to it, and at last Mr. Pett wrote it at Macdonald's dictation. Then Macdonald told him that he could have the run of Lady Aldington's house just as he had had before.

Lady Aldington had rather objected to this. She considered that little people like Mr. Pett ought to be punished, though she was sorry for Mrs. Pett. But Macdonald said that if they looked over it at all they would have to look over it altogether, if only for the good of the cause. Quarrelling and breaking-offs weren't nice things in this world. It meant a great deal to Mr. Pett and nothing at all to them. Besides, he had known Mr. Pett twenty years. Mr. Pett received the news with a cross between intellectual patronage and profuse gratitude. He resembled rather a brigadier-general who, being received by the Secretary of State for War after having lost his whole brigade of men in an engagement, received a medal and no mention of the disaster that had befallen him.

It was a grand clearing-up for Sergius Mihailovitch. He even spoke with some firmness to Miss di Pradella. He told her that if she would accept an engagement to dance at St. Petersburg he would continue to look after her financially. If she wouldn't, he wouldn't continue to support her and the numerous family of the Austrian waiter with the Polish name beyond that present year. Miss di Pradella signed the contract, but she hadn't really much idea of carrying it out. She knew she could always get round Sergius Mihailovitch.

So it was all cleared up with the exception of the eight hundred and ninety-seven pounds, two shillings.

Macdonald made various excuses for not producing the ukase, but both Kintyre and Lady Aldington knew perfectly well what was the real reason. Kintyre even approached Macdonald on the subject. He said that it wasn't reasonable for Sergius Mihailovitch to delay the marriage for a matter of a few pounds. He himself was perfectly ready to lend Macdonald eight hundred and ninety-seven pounds, two shillings, or whatever it was.

But Macdonald peremptorily refused. It was no good telling him that when he married Emily Aldington he would become by automatic process of the law Duke of Batalha and the eleventh richest man in the world. To Macdonald's crooked and inevitable idealism this wasn't reason. He was going to raise the money commercially before he married Lady Aldington. Kintyre said that this was mad; but Macdonald said that it didn't matter. He went to the Jews; but because of his transactions with Messrs. Zimmermann the Jews knew too much and at the same time too little about Sergius Mihailovitch. He offered them five hundred per cent.; he offered them his entire income from the Resiliens Car Company for three years. But the various money-lenders said that they were by no means certain that the Resiliens Car Company would last anything like as long as three years. And they couldn't see how a gentleman who was accustomed from time to time to pawn a dozen socks for two shillings was going to be in a position ever to repay eight hundred and ninety-seven pounds, two shillings, plus five hundred per cent. They were told that Macdonald had brilliant prospects, but the socks were too much for them. They were acquainted with all sorts of spendthrift lunatics, but Macdonald's kind was much too rare; they couldn't get any kind of accountant to average out the risks

attendant upon an unusually high sense of personal honour.

A new mental determination of Sergius Mihailovitch's impeded matters at this point. He got into his head to be extraordinarily careful of Lady Aldington's reputation. On the second of April they were to sail for Batalha on the yacht *Esmeralda*. But Macdonald declared that he would not sail with her unless they were actually married. He was determined to go by train to Toulon and sail with the Russian battleship, which was to reach Flores on April the fourth. It did not matter to him that this worried Emily very much; he was for the time being a man of action, and he was determined to conduct his actions along what seemed to him to be the most honourable lines. He tried money-lender after money-lender, but he could get nothing; and at last he realised that all these gentry were in communication one with another, as well as Messrs. Zimmermann, who, towards the end of the month, had all his personal property in pawn. On the first of April Macdonald received two hundred pounds, which was his quarter's salary from the Resiliens Company. Half of that sum was sufficient to get his things from the keeping of Messrs. Zimmermann. But the hundred pounds that remained wasn't any use to him when it came to obtaining a copy of the ukase. So he had finally broken the news to Emily that he was determined not to sail with her. She didn't make much fuss about it, but they were both of them hit to the heart.

She set off for Southampton, where the yacht was lying at ten o'clock of the morning of the second. The yacht was to sail at eleven that night, and they took their farewells on the station platform. Macdonald went round to his bank with the notes that Messrs. Zimmermann had given him as the remainder. Whilst he was filling up the pay-in slip it suddenly occurred to him to apply to the bank-

manager for that eight hundred and ninety-seven pounds, two shillings.

He found the manager in a remarkably cheerful frame of mind. Indeed, that gentleman said that he had been going to write to ask Macdonald for an interview for some days. A client of theirs was interested in Macdonald's property which the bank held in mortgage. The manager would be able to propose a transaction that would probably be satisfactory to all the three parties in common. What it amounted to was that the bank's client was ready to pay a large sum for the mining rights of eleven thousand acres of land in the Urals. The manager said that this property was a little encumbered by a law suit which was being brought against Macdonald by some of the other heirs and his mother. But the manager said that these heirs were ready to be bought out for a small sum in cash. Macdonald didn't pay much attention to what the manager had to say. He exclaimed himself :

"Look here, Goodge, is it worth two thousand pounds to me in half an hour ? "

The manager smiled with an inward but benevolent expression.

"It's worth five thousand to you in ten minutes," he said, "if you'll just sign a power of attorney to us. It ought to be worth a hundred thousand in two years, if you leave it quite in our hands and don't squander the lot in three weeks, which I suppose is what you'll do. You haven't the least idea what your property is worth. Perhaps it's a good thing that you haven't known. But if you leave it in our hands we can do something for you."

Macdonald really hadn't time to think, it just came into his head that he had always considered himself to be a wealthy man, and that, in spite of everything, he had been perfectly justified in behaving as such. It was the last thing that was wanted entirely to restore his self-respect.

He began an extraordinary gallop, of which he remembered precious little afterwards. Inside of ten minutes he was running down the steps of the bank with a sheaf of notes fluttering insecurely in his hands. The Resiliens' garage was just round the corner, and in a very few minutes he had signed a contract to hire the highest powered of the Resiliens' cars for three months, together with the services of the chief chauffeur, whom he knew very well. Inside of half an hour he was in the Chancellery of the Russian Embassy.

They had naturally mislaid the ukase itself, but by dint of looking up the form in dictionaries they provided him with a certified copy in somewhat less than three hours. During these three hours Macdonald was packing his luggage into the car and looking for a pope. It was rather difficult to get one to start with him, because most of the popes in London, whether they were connected with the Embassy or with one or other of the three Greek Churches, had a wholesome fear for their skins. At last, however, he found in Bayswater a priest who was not actually attached to either of these institutions, but was visiting London as a spy in Government Service, because he was personally acquainted with many revolutionaries. And this gentleman, happening fortunately to be very drunk, consented to accompany Macdonald amidst the perils of the counter-revolution, for the first piece of Russian territory that they would come across would be the Ministry of Flores. Towards five in the afternoon they had reached Aldershot on the way to Southampton, when Macdonald remembered that he had forgotten the copy of the ukase, so that it was six o'clock before they really left London. They were three times held up by police traps, and once a tyre burst. But just before eight o'clock it occurred to Macdonald to wire to Emily that he was coming, and that the yacht had better be brought up against a quay so that

they could get the car on board. The telegram, however, was never delivered, because in his hurry Macdonald had written the name of the yacht rather badly, and it was taken on board a cutter called the *Smaragda* that was lying in Hythe harbour. Thus it was only with some difficulty that towards ten-thirty they discovered the *Esmeralda*, which was lying out in mid-stream. And the pope being by now helpless with drink, they had to sling him on board tied into a chair. Ten minutes afterwards the *Esmeralda* started.

II

AND after that there were two days of sunshine and sea, and two nights of darkness and harbours, until they came to sitting alone on the captain's bridge with the yacht seeming all asleep beneath them. But a little after twelve there began to be footsteps on the decks and the muffled sounds of a large steamer waking in the night. At about twelve-thirty the captain came on the bridge, and with him the other Macdonald, who was called El Rey de Batalha. He was a red-whiskered, rather sleepy-looking Scotchman, with only one eye. He would have preferred to talk about the Church politics of the town of Auchtermuchtie in Scotland, for to tell the truth they were all of them a little bit tired of talking about the machined-like affairs of the counter-revolution. But they did talk it over once more to make certain.

At a quarter to one on the following day the King was to be proclaimed from the Town Hall, the Palace, and the Customs Buildings of Batalha. Each of these buildings was to be surrounded by a crowd of Lady Aldington's Cornish miners. The troops were to be disarmed, and telegrams were to be sent to every city in Galizia announcing the peaceful accession of Dom Pedro II. El Rey de Batalha anticipated no trouble of any kind whatever. Who was there to make any trouble? In Batalha there was no republican soldiery. The troops would lay down their arms and then, a quarter of an hour later, at his

command, they would take them up and fire a volley in salute of the King's reign. They were to allow an hour for the telegraphing of the news to Flores and for the circulating through the streets of enormous newspaper placards—which had been already printed by Dom Carrasco—announcing the fall of the republic in Batalha and the King's accession. At a quarter to two the battleship *Admiral Trogoff II* would pass between the headlands of Flores. The ministers of the republic were to come to the palace at four o'clock to surrender their portfolios to the King, who would confer them on his new ministry. This ministry were all ready on board the *Admiral Trogoff II*. They consisted entirely of Galizian refugees whom the King had met and tested in London.

The President of the Republic alone remained firm to the republican ideal. But in purely theoretic conversations Dom Carrasco had extorted from him the promise that, supposing the royalist party could give a show of force sufficiently overpowering, the President would command his Republican Guards to lay down their arms.

The *Admiral Trogoff II*, with Kintyre and the crew of filibusters on board, was just at that moment signalling by Marconigram to the yacht that she was a hundred and twenty miles to the westward, and that, although a slight defect had shown itself in her machinery, by easy steaming they would reach the city of Flores well upon the time. All the hands were reported to be in good spirits and perfectly sober.

The clicking and flashing of the Marconi instrument ceased; the captain said: "Now, Mr. Macdonald!" The Scotchman went down the companion; there were some soft cries as his boat was cast loose; a heavy rumble of the powerful engines commenced; some large sparks went from the funnels and dropped slowly on to the

black waters ; the *Esmeralda's* searchlight lit up palely the old forts at the harbour mouth, and they steamed out into the blackness of the sea. They sat there all night, hand in hand, watching the silhouette of the captain and one of the seamen as they moved above the illuminated disc of the bridge compass.

By seven-thirty of the next morning the King's motor car was being slung on to the quay of Flores harbour. Mr. and Mrs. Pett got into the car, which was a very big one, and then came Lady Aldington and Macdonald. As she got in Lady Aldington looked at the footman who sat beside Mr. Salt in a chauffeur's cap and goggles.

"Why, that's the King!" she said.

The car itself was surrounded by twenty seamen of the *Esmeralda* in white duck with red sashes. They carried stretchers with which to open a way through the crowd in case it should be very dense. As their car moved off they were met by an open landau surrounded by republican soldiers. It was coming to fetch, with six guards of honour, the Marquis da Pinta, who was to preside at the great bull-fight that the republic of Galizia was giving that day in honour of the immortal Alexandre Dumas. They were all going to this bull-fight, for it was deemed indispensable, if the counter-revolution was to succeed in the hearts of the people, that they should give this sign of courage, and pay this tribute of respect to the immortal poet.

In the streets there was very little crowd, and the car jolted equably over the very rough cobbles of the pavement. The principal street of Flores, which ran down to the quay, itself almost exactly resembled Regent Street, except that it was much broader. The houses along it were all of white painted stucco with square windows, and upon both sides of the street the sun-blinds were already down, though it was not yet eight o'clock. The sun fell straight on their faces. There were hardly any idlers in the street ; there

were hardly any people at all ; and there were no vehicles, so that the car might have gone at any pace it pleased except for the mountainous unevenness of the roadway. This reduced them to a mere walk, with the sailors walking behind, whilst a little way further back came the landau containing the Marquis da Pinta, surrounded by its soldiers in their old blue uniforms with epaulettes of pink and white worsted. The town appeared to be absolutely silent and at rest.

It took them about a quarter of an hour to get from end to end of this long street. Then they came upon a broad plaza, and here for the first time they saw the republican flag, drooping listlessly above the long white palace that had rusty streaks here and there from roof to pavement where the gutters had failed to act. In the centre of the roof of this palace of the Annunciation was the inevitable woman holding out a bay wreath from a three-horsed chariot. This lady represented Galizia, and above her the folds of the yellow, green, and white flag drooped against the bright blue sky. The palace itself was on the north of the square ; facing it were the several ministries of Galizia and the consulates and ministries of Foreign Powers, whilst on the east of the square was a dusty brick building with a green dome. This served for housing the Parliament by day and the theatre at night. In the centre of the square was a fountain representing Vincente Garcilasso, the celebrated Galizian explorer. He was represented as being clothed in a blanket, and extending one hand straight to heaven from decoratively treated waves of marble, for he had been drowned off Cape Horn in 1541. From four sides of the pedestal dribbled little streams of water that fell into an immense basin that they hardly wetted. In the square itself there was not a soul to be seen ; even the sentry boxes that were still painted with the royal colours, and that stood in front of all of the Govern-

ment buildings—even these were empty ; and the motor with its sailors, and the landau with its guard of honour, went, as if they were very lonely, over the great empty space.

They came immediately into a long, pleasant avenue of palm trunks. On each side there were villas hidden amongst olive and orange trees. And this lasted perhaps three-quarters of a mile. Here there were a good many people all walking in the same direction as themselves, most men in black broadcloth trousers of immense breadth, with short coats resembling Eton jackets, and huge straw hats with flat stiff brims. The women wore mostly stiff black skirts of silk coming down to their stout ankles, that were clad in white cotton stockings. Their shoes all had high heels with large brass buckles, and each woman had a black coarse lace shawl over her head and carried a red paper fan, because it was the day of the bull-fight. Gradually this crowd upon the side-walks between the pallid grey trunks of the palace trees grew more and more dense, until, looking from the driver's seat of the car, the young King could see what almost resembled an ordered pattern—two walls of black, picked out with the cream colour of the great straw hats and the vivid red of the paper fans. And Dom Pedro exclaimed to Mr. Salt :

“ These are my people.”

Mr. Salt, gazing straight in front of him, said with a fixed expression :

“ They appear to be very creditable and respectable. But I wouldn't talk about it if I were you, Mr. Spenlow.”

Mr. Salt was rather pale, and noticeably anxious.

As they slipped along the crowd became more and more dense, though the roadway was open and of rather good macadam. In places there were stalls for oranges and grapes. Some had large water-melons and others great polished cans of copper.

"Yes, these are my people," the King said; and behind his motor spectacles his eyes became suffused with tears.

Then suddenly from among the booths there began to go up mutters of cheering. Mr. Salt started so violently that had the car been travelling at any speed it would have jerked the wheel so as to send it into the side-walk. He said suddenly :

"Damn!" And then to the King: "Look round the corner of the car and see if the road is still clear behind us. We might be able to make a dash for it if I can get room to turn."

The King obediently looked round the corner of the car.

"No," he said. "The crowd is filling up behind the landau."

Again Mr. Salt said: "Damn!" very energetically, and Dom Pedro observed that his chauffeur was trembling as much as if the car had been travelling at fifty miles an hour.

"I said I'd never lay down my life for you," Mr. Salt said. "But oh, hell, this is the same as doing it. We're in the lion's den!"

The King laid his hand upon Mr. Salt's. "It is heroic of you," he said. "But my people are very gentle. There is no danger. See how they all smile."

"You've changed, Mr. Spenlow," the chauffeur said. "When I first entered your service, you didn't care any more for your kingdom than you did for marbles."

"Oh," Dom Pedro said, "that was because I was coming away then. Now I'm coming back. For me there may be some danger, but I like it. For I would rather be killed in this country than die in my bed in exile."

Mr. Salt exclaimed: "My aunt! What picture post-card talk!"

"But for you," the King said, "there is no danger at

all. For you are a foreigner, and it is well known that the Galizians are good and kind to all foreigners, such is the veneration for the laws of hospitality. They will not hurt any hair of your head ; but they will bear you on the palms of their hands as if you were a pigeon's egg. That is what the proverb says."

"Good Lord, how you've changed ! How you've changed !" Mr. Salt said.

"No, I haven't changed," Dom Pedro said. "It was always in me, but your fogs did not allow it to blossom. In this sunlight it is different."

"Well, that's a very ordinary sentiment," Mr. Salt commented. "They talk like that in every novel, but I've no doubt it does Your Majesty credit. It's the sort of thing that's wanted of you."

"It's the true way to feel," the King said.

"No doubt it is," Mr. Salt answered.

He was beginning to feel a little more composed, because it was perfectly true that in all that crowd which now surrounded them densely he could see nothing but smiles. It was like driving through a wilderness of happy children.

There began to appear different costumes. Women with white veils, as if they had been Mooresses ; and men with red cloaks, and black round hats like soup plates.

"Those are the women from Sarragonza, and those are the men from Alpiorge. Every one of them is fitted by birth to meet the bulls."

"Who'd have thought it ?" Mr. Salt said, and he repeated : "Who'd have thought it ?" He was thinking not of the women from Sarragonza, or of the men from Alpiorge in their red cloaks, but of the fact that he, the son of the Wesleyan Minister of Stoke Pogis, should be there, driving a car, and grimly enthusiastic, in a bad-tempered

way, for the cause of a little Papist boy. For whenever he had driven a car in Roman Catholic countries Mr. Salt had been conscious of lasting disapproval. He relieved himself by saying bitterly :

“ I suppose I ought to kiss Your Majesty’s hand ? ”

“ You may do that to-morrow, Mr. Salt,” the King said. “ And I will give you an order of knighthood.”

“ Gracious and everything ! ” Mr. Salt exclaimed bitterly; and then, seeing a break in the crowd that forked out into two paths, Mr. Salt, whose nerves couldn’t stand any longer the slowness, called to the sailor in front of him to get out of the way, and hooting energetically, pressing his foot hard upon the lever and pulling the brakes, he shot towards the bodies of men and out into the blinding sunlight of a dusty field. It was closed in front of them by an immense wall of mouldering masonry. He spun the car swiftly and dexterously over the hundred yards of sunlit space and brought it up with a sharp curve exactly in front of a body of dusty soldiery that were waiting before a ruined arch in the wall. He had always taken trouble to master details, and he exclaimed—for he had taken the trouble to ask Lady Aldington’s courier all about it—he exclaimed to the officer in blue and pink who barred their way :

“ La Duchessa de Batalha y la sua sociedad ! ” for all the world as if he had been in tranquillity outside Buckingham Palace.

The officer bowed extraordinarily low, and led them, car and all, beneath the ruined arch. Here he opened the door like a lackey and, glancing at his frowning soldiery, he whispered in Emily Aldington’s ears whilst he assisted her to alight :

“ Viva El Rey Don Pedro el segundo ! ” And then, “ Remember, Highness, that I was the first to say these words to you ! ”

And then to Macdonald : " It's all well."

And Macdonald answered : " It's all very well."

To Mr. Pett he whispered : " I kiss your hands." And to Mrs. Pett : " I kiss your beautiful little feet."

Mrs. Pett tried to hide her dusty shoes beneath her skirt. Then the officer called out : " Attention ! Guard ! Present arms to the honourable guests of the republic."

The sulky soldiers did something with their very old muskets.

They were under an immense ruined arch, the whole bulk of them, soldiers, ladies, officers, and guests. Mr. Salt jumped out of his car and covered the King's back with his own body. He was very much afraid of the bayonets of the sulky soldiers, and he kept on muttering :

" Damn ! damn ! damn !"

For just a moment there was an ugly feeling in the air. The officer exclaimed : " Follow me," and he disappeared into a dirty sort of tunnel. Macdonald pushed the two ladies quickly into the opening, then the young King, then Mr. Pett. But Mr. Salt refused to go ; he said that he wasn't going to leave his car amongst all those blighters, for he was furiously angry, though he didn't know why, with the republican bodyguard of the President. And, indeed, just at that moment the landau containing the Marquis da Pinta rattled in under the arch, and he had to move the car further up.

" Keep it in readiness," Macdonald called to him ; and Mr. Salt said :

" I'll have the engines running the whole blessed time."

There was again a little delay with the Marquis da Pinta, who was accompanied by the Dom Crisostomo Carrasco. Neither of these gentlemen desired to precede Macdonald into the tunnel. Dom Carrasco exclaimed :

" It is dangerous to be the last. That is my position."

"It is certainly dangerous to be the last," Macdonald said; "but I had rather have these angry soldiers behind me than you."

Dom Carrasco exclaimed: "Ha!" He gave a piercing glance to Macdonald, and then disappeared into the tunnel.

Macdonald went across to Mr. Salt, who had turned his car round.

"You know the way back to that square where the fountain is?" he said. "The palace is on the right, the Russian Ministry on the left. You know the Russian Eagle? If I tell you to put on speed, put on speed like the devil. There's no speed limit here."

"I know; oh, I know," Mr. Salt said. "Don't you go and say that I wasn't ready to lay down my life for Mr. Spenlow."

"That'll do," Macdonald said. "Your business is to run your car."

Before going himself into the tunnel he stopped to ask one of the soldiers for a light for his cigarette.

The man grumbled and spat, but at last he produced from his baggy trousers a flint and steel.

Macdonald said in Galizian, which he had been studying for six months:

"Your uniform's disgraceful; there's a tear under your armpit. You've done it with your own bayonet. That's not the way to handle arms. This will have to be altered."

The soldier glared feverishly. "And who is the Senhor Cavalier to talk of these things?" he said.

"This morning I am nothing," Macdonald said. "But this afternoon I shall be the Duke de Batalha." The soldiers pressed round him. "I shall be the Honorary Colonel of your regiment," Macdonald said, "so if you want to shake hands with me you must shake hands

now, for this afternoon I shall be your superior officer—by marriage.”

“What is all this?” an under-officer grumbled.

“I have offered to shake hands with you,” Macdonald said, “for this afternoon I shall marry the Duchess de Batalha.”

“What is the Duchess de Batalha to us?” the under-officer said.

“Why, she is a very charming woman,” Macdonald answered. “And a wedding is always a wedding, and the men of Galizia are always gallant men.”

“Well, I will shake hands with you,” the under-officer said.

He was a lean, brown man with a patch over one eye. But he cuddled his musket to him and held out his hands. Many other hands were also held out. Macdonald took from his hip-pocket a small bag that contained much silver.

Mr. Salt suddenly pushed through the soldiers to his side.

“Your Excellency is in danger,” he said. “They’re an ugly-looking crowd. What are you doing?”

“Oh, this is only dramatic effect,” Sergius Mihailovitch smiled. “I’m happy. I don’t see why I shouldn’t make these poor devils happy—by acting to them.”

The soldiers were grumbling a little. There were perhaps a hundred and twenty of them. And they didn’t like this colloquy of two foreigners.

“Now see?” Macdonald exclaimed; and he raised his voice: “Friends,” he cried—“for when it comes to weddings and feasts we are all friends——”

The under-officer exclaimed: “True! But this afternoon I hope to have my bayonet in your stomach.”

“Oh no,” Macdonald answered; “I hope this afternoon you will have a good meal of my providing in your

stomach, for I can see you are all hungry men. Now take this silver. It is not forty pieces. It is more. It is not a bribe. It is a wedding favour, and all gallant men can put on wedding favours."

"We'll put them in, not on," a ragged soldier said. And then they laughed, all of them.

Macdonald had his hand in the little bag. It contained four handfuls of silver, and these he threw towards the roof of the arch. Immediately all the muskets fell to the ground, and the paving stones were a welter of blue cloth uniforms and pink and white worsted epaulettes. Macdonald took out another little bag of silver and gave it to the under-officer.

"The scrambling," he said, "is what luck does for them. Now, here in this other bag is enough to give each of them five hundred peccadi."

"Now that is considerate," the under-officer grumbled, "for those who had to trust to luck might, some of them, go hungry."

"Well, I am considerate," Macdonald said. "That is what I am here to be. If you put yourselves in my hands not many of you would go hungry."

"That will be as the devil enacts," the under-officer said. "If you overpower us you overpower us, and it is the will of God."

"Well, I've overpowered you now," Macdonald exclaimed.

And indeed the soldiers, each with a small piece of silver, were running with the gait of released convicts towards the provision stalls; even the under-officer ran austere after them. He was as good a republican as Cato, but he was very hungry. The soldiers of the *Esmeralda* began to come by ones and twos, and Macdonald sent them into the tunnel to see the bull-fight. They were all very cheerful.

"I think they're all in now," Macdonald said to Mr. Salt. "I'm afraid you'll have a dull time waiting. I'd take your place if I could, but I may be wanted."

Mr. Salt grunted to save himself from saying that that would be all right, for he disliked appearing gracious. And then he asked sarcastically:

"What do you think you've done by giving those chaps money? You don't think you've bribed them?"

"My dear Salt," Macdonald said, "I'm a happy man. I'm a confounded happy man. And I didn't like to see those dirty leather sword-belts round those empty worsted stomachs. That's all. I just wanted them to have a square meal. I'm not always on the make."

"Well, you're the queer gentleman, as the Irish people would say," Mr. Salt commented. "But if you want to make everybody happy you won't have enough happiness to get through the day with. There's not enough in the world to go round. You look out that your own happiness don't run out before it's time to light the lamps."

"Oh, I'll take my chance," Macdonald said.

"Now, you know," Mr. Salt commented, "you can't go on being like a Jesus Christ all your life. I'm speaking in this unpleasant manner because it gave me a shock to see you standing amongst all those hooligans. I didn't like it. And it's turned my bowels round. I don't want to see you killed. Don't go taking any more risks! No, don't! I feel just sick, I do. That's why I'm speaking indecently."

"That's just affection for me," Macdonald said. "Don't you see, if you feel like that about me, you're as you might say one of the family. It's very touching and it's very pleasing, and I don't deserve it. But if you're one of the family and feel like that, you've got to take the risks. I

mean that I've got to take the risks, and you've got to sympathise and feel bad. I can't help it. That's the way we are made."

Mr. Salt said: "I don't want it. I don't want to see you take risks. This is all too beastly dangerous. And what do you get out of it, I should like to ask?"

"Get?" Macdonald answered. "Mr. Salt as a member of my family, that's what I get. It's quite enough."

Mr. Salt suddenly grew pallid, and his eyes started out of his head.

"What's that damn-fool row?" he whimpered.

A heavy waft of sound seemed to assail them from every side.

"I suppose it's the bulls coming into the ring," Macdonald explained. "The people are cheering."

"That's not cheering," Mr. Salt said. "It's an ugly sound. I tell you I'm afraid for you and her ladyship. It's ugly."

Mr. Salt retired behind his car on the other side of the arch and became violently sick, so that Macdonald had to go after him with a small flask of brandy.

"Oh, it's all right," he said comfortingly. "There aren't any shots. You can't hear any shots. It's all cheering. So there's no danger."

"If there were any blooming danger," Mr. Salt said, "you'd be there. Just because there isn't you aren't there. But you ought to be. Go away. Go and sit in your place of honour. You've kicked up all this row, and you ought to be sitting on the throne, or whatever it is. Instead of that the play is going on, and you're on the backstairs giving brandy to a skilled mechanic whose stomach isn't strong enough for his job. Hark at that beastly row! It makes my inside shake like a blanc-mange!"

"Well, somebody's got to tidy up the backstairs of historic events," Macdonald said. "We can't all be sitting in the stalls. I can't leave you here in this state of nerves all alone, you'd be setting fire to the car. And the car may be the most important thing of this day. Somebody's got to look after the most important thing of the day, and that somebody has got to be me."

"Here's a blooming insult to a skilled mechanic," Mr. Salt grumbled. "Set fire to my car! What do you take me for? . . . But you're jolly well right. I'm not fit to be left alone . . . And the car—the car is the most important thing . . ."

Lady Aldington was sitting in a blaze of morning sunshine. Towards the afternoon the sun would swing round and they would be in shadow. For the moment it was not unpleasantly hot. And the broad seats sloped slowly down to the stretch of sand in the arena. The seats were nearly all black and white, picked out here and there with the scarlet coats of the men coming from the town of bull-fighters. The immense amphitheatre was so crowded that they stood. That was why the streets were so empty. There was a clumsy Galizian proverb which said: "If a thief could resist the seductions of the Correida, the merchants of Flores would be ruined men." For you would not find an adult man who could stand in all that city. The amphitheatre itself had been built by the Romans, and it would hold half a million people. But across the southern end the Moors had built a great flat mass of stones, which had been the castle of El Huel Huescan, the Moorish viceroy. It was from the mouldering walls of this Moorish edifice that Lady Aldington was looking down into the arena. Their seats sloped right down to the white sand.

They had a sort of confined pen to themselves. And of her own company there were herself and Mr. and Mrs. Pett. Mr. Dexter and Miss Dexter had gone ashore much earlier, and had been in their seats since six o'clock. It was then only just nine, but to Lady Aldington it seemed as if it must be very late in a very long day. Behind them in their own division sat the sailors of the *Esmeralda*, and in their ranks was the young King in his chauffeur's uniform. The entrance to their seats was being guarded by the officer of the Republican Guard.

There was a great rustle of voices dissipating itself beneath the enormous space of the sky, so that at first it was a little confusing. Then to the right of her Lady Aldington perceived a nearly empty space of seats. At the bottom of this space were the blue-and-pink uniforms of, perhaps, two hundred of the Republican Guards. Higher up, with a table before him, sat a solitary gentleman in a black frock-coat with a dull-looking top-hat. Just behind him were two girls in cheap brown skirts, white blouses, and sailor hats. This was the President of the Republic with his two motherless daughters. And so solitary and so desolate did this obscure-looking man appear with his background of empty seats that for a moment Lady Aldington was struck with the feeling of his desolation. Indeed, it really gave her pleasure to see at last descending to the seats a company of men in bright-green coats with golden palms upon the collars. They were the members of the Academy of Galizia, and they were leading in the Marquis da Pinta, who, in addition to the green dress with its Academic plumes, wore a great ostrich feather. For a moment Lady Aldington felt a pang in the contrary direction ; it seemed as if this crowd of people in green and gold were coming to support the President. But they were not. The President gave way at the table before the Marquis da Pinta. And from all the people in that immense space

there went up so huge a cry that the ravens flying overhead might well have fallen to the ground. Then she saw that the Academicians grouped themselves round Da Pinta at the table. The President with his two shabby, modest daughters went lower down and sat behind his soldiers, once more desolate and alone. Further along still were a number of gentlemen in black frock-coats with women in ill-fitting Parisian clothes. They were the republican ministry, and Lady Aldington disliked looking at them, because she knew that she had bought them for two thousand pounds apiece. Then she began to get anxious about the absence of Macdonald.

Mr. Pett beside her was talking about the local colour in an excited frame of mind. Mrs. Pett was quite silent. Suddenly Lady Aldington perceived a white figure, in a long cloak, with a long motor veil streaming behind, following an officer down the empty presidential seats. It was Countess Macdonald. . . .

She took her place immediately beside the President, as if defiantly she were determined that no one should say she had not supported the republic on principle; and indeed she had really given all her money to buy powder for the ragged troops. And again Lady Aldington became conscious of an agony of fear because of Macdonald's absence. The Marquis da Pinta suddenly waved his cocked hat, and amidst a very thin blare of trumpets some little figures began to appear at the far distant end of the arena—white horses, men with spears, men on foot with scarlet cloaks, white stockings, black round hats, all very clear and small in the limpid atmosphere. There was an enormous noise, fans and little packets of cigarettes began to spout from the audience on to the sands. It was the Corrieda, the cavalcade of Gay El Huelto, the celebrated Madrid toreador, whom they had brought there to do honour to the memory of the immortal Dumas. Small, desultory, the

procession streamed over the glaring sunlight of the white sand. . . .

Lady Aldington's anxiety became painful. Mr. Pett began to talk to her cheerfully and garrulously about the lust for blood that existed in human breasts. He mentioned the theory of Sclaso, the Italian psychologist, who said "that a certain amount of cruelty, vicarious or inflicted by one's self, was an absolute necessity to humanity in a civilised state." It was for that reason that fairly highly civilised communities indulged in painful practical jokes, and that very civilised people read tragic works. Lady Aldington said that the theory appeared to her to be repulsive. If we were civilised we were civilised, and there wasn't any need to shed blood in order to make us know it. And all the while she was wondering what had become of Macdonald. She imagined that he must have been taken prisoner by the republican soldiers. Possibly at that very minute he was being placed against the wall of the amphitheatre and being shot. It seemed to her impossible to sit still or impossible to think of anything else. She could positively see Macdonald standing in the nettles against the high white wall looking at the muskets. . . .!

But Mr. Pett thought Emily Aldington was perfectly inhuman. She sat there so calmly, although she must have known that some of them were in danger. But she didn't appear to know it; on the contrary, she had eyes for everything.

Great guttural roars were coming from the audience. The ceremony in the bull ring had come to a halt; there was no mistaking the angry tone in the voices of the spectators.

"What's that? What's that?" Mr. Pett shivered nervously.

"Oh, there's nothing to be alarmed about," Lady

Aldington said. "The people are only calling out for the bulls. There seems to be some delay about them."

"Oh, is that all?" Mr. Pett said. "I thought it had begun." And once more he talked feverishly about Professor Sclaso's theory.

The audience began to get very angry. They were shouting rhythmically the word "Toros!" each syllable coming like a clap of thunder. With the opera-glasses it was possible to see that many men were shaking their fists at the presidential box, and more particularly the men in the red cloaks.

The rather terrible rhythmic sound became at last too much for Mr. Pett. Suddenly he started to his feet.

"I can't understand," he said in an agitated squeak, "how you can sit there so calmly! I want it to begin. Why doesn't it begin? If we hadn't got to wait for that battleship it might begin at once." And suddenly he gave a real scream. There had come a particularly ominous sound—the long rattle of musket butts upon the wooden seats. The blue line of troops below the president had moved suddenly like a wave. He had commanded them to order arms, and they were all on their feet standing at "Attention." This preceded a momentary silence amongst the crowd—a silence of watchful and sinister attention. A high clear voice called out: "Viva Dom Pedro el segundo." The boy in the chauffeur's dress, sitting amongst the white sailors from the *Esmeralda*, suddenly stood up, but the soldiers beneath the president shouted all together: "Viva la Republica Galiziana," and drowned any noise that he might have made. And the coxswain of Lady Aldington's pinnace pulled him down to his seat again.

"I can't stand it!" Mr. Pett exclaimed. "The soldiers are going to fire! I must go away!"

" Well, go and ask Sergius Mihailovitch to come to me," Lady Aldington said.

Mr. Pett suddenly scrambled over the sunlit seats. He bolted into the tunnel past the officer, but as he turned to the right and not to the left he never came across Sergius Mihailovitch. He paced up and down in the darkness of the Moorish buildings ; then he found himself in the sunlight. His agitation had become tremendous. Like Mr. Salt, whom he resembled by birth and training, he grew to feel exceedingly sick. Renewed shouts from the amphitheatre seemed to galvanise his legs. He hurried straight in front of him through the blinding sunlight. He walked, he walked down a long avenue of palms, across a long broad street that resembled Regent Street. He was just walking straight in front of him. He never met a soul. Then suddenly he found himself upon the quay ; he found himself going down the gangway of the *Esmeralda*. When he realised that that was where he was, he ran agitatedly down the companion, scuttling like a rabbit to his own cabin. He unearthed a bottle of aspirin from his cabin trunk, and he swallowed five or six tabloids. The ship was absolutely silent, only from another cabin he could hear the loud groans of an elderly woman. It was the Queen-Mother groaning about sea-sickness. Mr. Pett could not stand the sound. He went into the corridor and knocked at the door of the drawing-room, which had been converted into the private cabin for Her Majesty. An altar, with a gilt statue of St. Anthony and the Child, had been erected at the forward end of the long saloon. The Queen-Mother was upon her knees before this, an English priest standing at her side. When Mr. Pett entered she screamed out violently :

" Oh, is it over ? Is it over ? "

The priest was very pale and anxious. He explained to Mr. Pett that Her Majesty was extremely afraid of dying

of sea-sickness. She was sure she would die if the counter-revolution did not succeed, and if she had to go back to Southampton by sea.

"Will it succeed?" the priest asked. He was quite pale.

"No, it won't," Mr. Pett answered viciously. "It's been lamentably mismanaged."

The Queen began to scream violently, and, like Mr. Salt, Mr. Pett found nothing to say but: "Damn, Damn, Damn," in a sort of mystic passion. He went back to his own cabin. Then he began to cry; then, the aspirin working upon him, he stumbled towards his bed and fell fast asleep.

In the seats of the arena Lady Aldington had looked after him as he went upwards. Mrs. Pett had moved nearer to her, as if for comfort.

"What's the matter with him?" Lady Aldington asked.

"It's one of his attacks," Mrs. Pett answered. "He's very miserable."

"What's he miserable about?" Lady Aldington asked.

"Oh, it's the feeling," Mrs. Pett said, "that he's betraying his old comrades. He hasn't been able to sleep very well because he's always dreaming that dead Socialists like Henry George and William Morris come and reproach him."

"Well, I suppose he can't help it?" Lady Aldington said. "It's a pity he's so weak. Why don't you go and look after him?"

"Oh, he'll walk it off," Mrs. Pett said. "Besides, I daren't go near him when he has these fits of depression. It's quite on the cards that he might turn on me and strangle me. Then, of course, he'd be hung. I don't think I should much object to being strangled, but it would be bad for the children if he were hung."

Lady Aldington patted Mrs. Pett gently on the shoulder.

"Do you suppose," she said, "that he'll have asked Sergius Mihailovitch to come to me?"

"No, I don't suppose it for a moment," Mrs. Pett exclaimed. "I'm very sorry. I'll go myself."

"No, don't," Lady Aldington said.

It did not, however, seem to be the time for any display of tender feminine emotion. Mr. Dexter suddenly climbed up from his seat, with his Mamie behind him. Mr. Dexter was really quite calm.

"I think it's all going all right, your ladyship," he said. "Unless the soldiers begin to fire, the counter-revolution is perfectly safe. I think I'll go and shake hands with His Majesty and congratulate him."

"Oh, don't do that," Lady Aldington said. "It's all going all right. The soldiers won't fire on the people; that's agreed, as you know, with the President."

"It's all perfectly thrilling!" Miss Dexter exclaimed. "Now, isn't it all perfectly thrilling? And it's all so high-minded. For you are all agreed to do all you can to avoid bloodshed. The poor old President won't let his troops fire as long as he's got the upper hand. And he won't let them fire after he's lost the upper hand, because it would be so useless. Now, that's what I call fine! It's all fine! Aren't they a fine people with all that self-control and everything? They're like Roman senators."

Mr. Dexter said: "Now, Mamie, you sit here right beside her ladyship and I guess I'll stroll round." He looked, however, seriously at Emily. "You don't think," he said, "that there's the remotest danger of the soldiers shooting at you? Because if there is I guess I'll stop here."

"Oh, there's not the remotest danger of that," Lady

Aldington said. "It would lead to too much bloodshed. And the President wants to avoid bloodshed as much as we do. Besides, we are only spectators. No, there's not the remotest danger for *us*."

Mrs. Pett had been looking intently at Lady Aldington's calm face. And suddenly it occurred to her to see that Emily was suffering an intense anguish caused by the absence of Sergius Mihailovitch. Immediately she got up and, a little common-place figure in her white duck dress, she climbed up the sloping steps. She was going to fetch Sergius Mihailovitch.

Mr. Dexter pierced a cigar with his stiletto, bit it, and slowly strolled away, glancing about the arena. The steady calls for the bulls on the part of the spectators had fallen to a dead silence. From the arena there came the sound of a great number of guitars, played in unison with a strong metallic twang. The poor President of the Republic, hoping to add splendour to this bull-fight, had sold nearly all he possessed in order to bring a famous troop of dancers from Madrid. They were to have performed in the audience between the successive bull-fights, whilst they were dragging out the carcasses. Now he had given the order that they should dance while they were waiting for the bulls. Twenty women and four men were performing rhythmical contortions upon a square of nailed boards that some mules had dragged into the centre of the arena. The guitars clanged on. The audience was entirely silent out of its studied respect for all foreigners. There was not even a whisper on any of the benches, so singularly well disciplined in this respect was that people. The spearmen supporting the toreadors and all the figures of the bull-fighters stood at attention before the President's box, the white horses motionless and dejected beneath their red and silver trappings. The sun had become very hot, but it had shifted until all the gentlefolk were now in

the shadow of the Moorish buildings, whilst all the other seats glowed with the sunlight. The twenty girls and the four men who had been dancing sat down upon the boxes. The audience applauded with a polite moderation. The extraordinary figure of a man in grey, thin and very long, but with enormous trousers tucked into his boots, began springing extraordinarily high to the sound of the guitars. He smacked one thigh, then the other; the rhythmical clapping of hands of the other dancers became like a volley of musketry. Suddenly Miss Dexter said in Lady Aldington's ear :

" I guess that Countess Macdonald is trying to get us shot."

And they perceived that the Countess, in her long robes made of white Witney blankets, was violently attracting the President's attention towards their seats. She was pointing her hand dramatically straight at Lady Aldington. The President shook his head, which he kept averted, as if he did not wish to look at them.

" I guess she does want to have us shot," Miss Dexter said.

The Countess was running, stumbling down the few seats towards the fringe of soldiers. She caught hold of the arm of one of the officers, and again pointed at the three women above her to the right. Many of the soldiers looked round.

" She's trying to get us shot against the orders of the President," Miss Dexter said. But the officer shook his head, and they heard him call " Attention ! "

There were many cries of dissatisfaction amongst the spectators, for this noise appeared to them to be a gross want of respect to the illustrious dancer in grey ; besides, it came from the presidential enclosure. One of the President's daughters hurried quickly down to the Countess. She caught hold of the gesticulating white arm, and both women

sat down side by side just behind the soldiers. The Countess was talking violently, but the soldiers had resumed their rigid gaze into the arena.

Then Sergius Mihailovitch came and sat down quietly beside Emily. He was smiling.

"The bulls haven't come, then," he said. "That's all right."

Emily said, rather fiercely: "How could you leave me alone like that?"

"But you weren't in any danger," Sergius Mihailovitch answered.

"I was going mad," she said. "You hadn't the right to leave me like that!"

"But I had to," Sergius Mihailovitch answered. "I had duties. I've been making perfectly certain that the bulls wouldn't come."

"It was you that did that?" Lady Aldington said.

"Of course it was I," he answered. "Don't you see that that's the real stroke of genius? Don't you see that it discredits the President in the eyes of the people? Infinitely more than if he had stolen all the crown jewels. It's the end of the republic. I paid the bull tenders last night a thousand pounds to drive the bulls clear away. They're twenty miles off now, all following the little donkey. There isn't a bull within a radius of twenty miles. I don't suppose they could even rake up a cow."

Lady Aldington looked at him with a queer analytic glance.

"You're a perfect devil, sometimes," she said. "That's why your eyelids slope so queerly. I couldn't have found it in my heart to disgrace that wretched broken man so utterly. Look at him!"

The black-coated President was sitting stiffly, gazing into the arena.

"Well, he's done for," Sergius Mihailovitch said. "We had to do for him. Yes, it was damnably cruel." Then he smiled suddenly at her. "But then," he said, "I'll tell you what really gave me the idea. I knew you'd hate to see bulls killed, and I knew it was essential that you should show yourself here; that was what did it. When I thought of that I was determined that there shouldn't be a bull in the ring. I paid my money for that. I wasn't thinking of the counter-revolution."

"But you said," Lady Aldington exclaimed, "that it was a stroke of genius."

Macdonald laughed. "I shouldn't have said it if it had been," he exclaimed. "Don't you know me better than that? It was just a happy accident."

She rested her hand for a moment caressingly on the sleeve of his light grey suit.

"Then I forgive you for keeping me waiting," she said. "But that was cruel enough."

Macdonald looked out over the arena. A quite loud sound of applause had come from the spectators. And it was repeated when the dancers held up their hands, showing that they were exhausted, and that their dancing had come to an end. And then, a moment after, the other really terrible cry of Toros began to sound.

"I think we'd better go and get married," Macdonald said equably. "I don't like to leave Mrs. Pett alone with Mr. Salt. There are a lot of soldiers there. It might be an ugly job to get away later."

Lady Aldington said: "It's come, then." She was looking away over the arena, and there was a faint flush of colour in her cheeks.

"Yes, come!" Macdonald said. "It's really very dangerous. Look at the soldiers looking up. They're not looking at us. They're looking at the King. My amiable Countess has told them that he's the King. Some

of them believe it, some of them don't. We'd better clear out. They wouldn't shoot you or me, because we're foreigners. But the King is Galizian. Let's go and get married."

Lady Aldington stood up. But Miss Dexter remained obstinately still.

"I guess I'm not coming," she said. "I guess Popper will be back. I guess I don't want to see you married."

Lady Aldington had already climbed up three steps. Macdonald caught hold of the girl's wrist.

"You've got to come," he said. "If I have to carry you you've got to come. Look, there's a soldier aiming."

"I shan't see you married," the girl said.

The officer suddenly flung himself upon the musket of the soldier who was aiming. But another turned round and lifted his rifle. Lady Aldington was just coming to a level with the King's feet. She called to the sailors to get round the King, but as they did not understand quite rightly who the King was, they only moved irresolutely. She sprang up the three seats that separated her from the King, and she stood right in front of his body.

"Get out quickly!" she said. "The soldiers are going to shoot at you."

They were all of them in a bustle. The officer came running along to them.

"No, don't come here!" Lady Aldington said. "Lead the way through the tunnel to the car."

Sergius Mihailovitch was pulling at Miss Dexter's wrist.

"This isn't the time," he said violently, "to show off personal jealousies. It's odious! It's abominable! They'll be firing at me next. You'll be getting me killed."

She looked up at him with a blank and expressionless hatred.

"Then you'll only draw their fire on me if you stop," she said. "You'll get me killed. You'd better go away. I'm not going to see you married."

Macdonald turned and walked slowly up the seats. He was very angry, and he turned to look back at the soldiers. The others had already got to the tunnel and were out of danger. The Countess was pointing straight at him and calling out, but the President's daughter was also calling out. The soldiers wavered. And then, from amongst the confused bunch of green and gold Academicians surrounding the Marquis da Pinta, there came a single, slight report. There was also a little thud on the wood of the seat just above him, and Macdonald perceived the hole made by a revolver bullet, but he could not see the man who had fired, though there was some confusion amongst the Academicians.

"By Jove!" Macdonald said to himself. "Da Pinta's put somebody up to murder me."

He stood for a moment longer looking at all the brightness. There wasn't any doubt now that half the crowd was calling out "Viva Dom Pedro." And there couldn't be any doubt that the cry was spreading. Macdonald shrugged his shoulders and turned into the tunnel behind the officer.

Beneath the tall entrance arch the others were already in the car; even the King was in his place beside Mr. Salt. But there were many soldiers also there, and just in front of the bonnet stood the one-eyed under-officer. The officer who had led them called out: "Out of the way, let this car proceed;" but the under-officer said:

"No, no; we do not know who these people are!"

"Come!" Macdonald cried out. "You know very well that I am going to be married to this lady. Upon my word

of honour, we are going straight to the Russian Ministry to be married. As you are a gallant man who have worn my wedding-favours, you will not impede us."

The under-officer hesitated for a moment, moving irresolutely a little to one side; and then Mr. Salt suddenly pushed his hand forward. The great car moved on, the mud-guard knocking the under-officer right off his feet.

Whilst they still moved slowly they heard a voice crying :

"Treason to the State! Treason to the State!" in Galizian. The car was gathering way. They heard the voice more faintly: "The King! the King!" And then, more faintly still: "That is Dom Pedro on the machine." They were thirty yards off now and moving quickly. Then quite a loud voice called out: "Fire!"

Mr. Salt spun his wheel suddenly, and the machine went away at right angles, skidding over the grass. There was a loud noise of explosion. Macdonald felt his cap suddenly jerked from his head. The glass shield between the driving-seat and the body of the car suddenly splintered. Mrs. Pett screamed. Mr. Salt was swearing at the top of his voice: "They've hit my hand, they've hit my hand." But the car went ahead, plunging in among the booths at the top of the long avenue.

They heard Mr. Salt say: "I can't steer, my left wrist's broken."

And they heard the King say: "Put on the speed, I'll steer."

He leaned over with his hand on the wheel, and after a moment of hesitation the great car purred down the avenue at an immense speed, with the sound like that of scissors going through velvet. They swung, lurching out of the shadow of the Avenue of Palm Trees to the left, into the brilliant light of the plaza. And before they had taken

two breaths they were in front of a white house that had in front of it, over its door, a shield displaying a double-headed-eagle upon a lozenge. Macdonald jumped quickly out and began to assist the King in getting out Mr. Salt, for Mr. Salt had fainted in a complicated manner behind his wheel. But Mrs. Pett was astonished to see the nonchalance with which Lady Aldington got together her wraps. She did not even forget a little map of the city of Flores in a red cover that they had purchased, after some difficulty in finding it, in Trafalgar Square three days before.

III

THERE was an air of champagne about all the rest of the counter-revolution, and, looking from the windows of the ministry, they appeared to be rather the spectators at a state function than participators at an historic event. The first thing that they noticed, after Mr. Salt's scratch on the wrist—for it was no more than a scratch—had been tied up by Mrs. Pett, was that a banquet of quite unreasonable profusion had been spread in the large bare lower room of the ministry. The minister himself was an agreeable enough young person, a bankrupt prince from somewhere away in the neighbourhood of Albania. But he was not the sort of person who could normally have provided so much gold plate, and neither Sergius Mihailovitch nor Lady Aldington happened to have given any thought to what they would eat that day. In the general rush of things there was really too much to do.

Macdonald had remembered to see to it that the captain of the *Esmeralda*, with all the remainder of the crew, had escorted the pope from the yacht to the ministry. And they had forcibly prevented his touching anything in the shape of alcohol. Moreover, there were now altogether about eighty sailors and engineers from the yacht in the building itself, so that Macdonald, considering that they were now actually upon Russian soil, did not imagine that any danger whatever remained. But there was the banquet,

and although Macdonald was ready to accept the large gilt *pâtés de foie gras*, the great silver-gilt dishes of sweetmeats and the sixteen different kinds of champagne that stood upon a side-table, he was nevertheless somewhat astonished to find that it was the Greek orthodox Archbishop of Neicomesia, and not the pope that they had brought with them, who was prepared to receive Lady Aldington into the Russian Church, a formality which necessarily preceded the wedding.

And then he was exceedingly astonished, though really he need not have been, as he realised in the next minute, for there came from the plaza a most extravagant rattling and jingling—a suggestive and unpleasant sound that could only mean one thing. And when they went quickly to the window they could see the broad wheel bases, the long brown barrels, of half a dozen unmistakable field-guns. It felt like an absurd dream coming comfortably right. For there must have been at least two hundred sailors in white duck with rather silly looking caps, all hauling the guns into position. Once in position the muzzles pointed straight from the front of the ministry upon the white and rusty front of the Palace of the Annunciation. And then Macdonald perceived, amongst the white duck of the sailors, the larger form of the Grand Duke in the dark blue and gold uniform of a Russian admiral. He stood for a moment on the cobbles outside, giving a glance of satisfaction at the guns, then he strolled into the house. At the door of the banqueting-room he exclaimed to Macdonald:

“I hope it’s perfectly regular? I hope you’ve been fired at.”

“Oh, I’ve been fired at all right,” Macdonald said.

The Grand Duke took off his cocked hat and wiped his forehead with a purple pocket-handkerchief. He was very hot.

“Then it’s all perfectly regular,” he said. He looked

round the room. "If there's anybody here," he said, "who represents the Galizian authorities, I beg to report that I have landed half a park of Imperial Naval field-guns to protect the valuable life of a Russian subject who has been fired upon during a rising in the country."

The young King had taken off his motor coat. He was in grey tweeds, and he was exceedingly angry.

"I am the King of this country," he said. "I object in the very strongest manner to my claims being asserted by means of any foreign artillery."

"That's all right, that's all right," the Grand Duke said. "This is one of the little troubles of being a king. I'm not helping you, you understand; I'm insulting you. Don't you believe that those guns are meant to help in putting you on the throne. Not a bit of it. They're just an insult."

"I don't understand," the King said. "But I won't have foreign guns turned upon my people in order to help me."

"But I'm telling you it's an insult," the Grand Duke said painfully. "It's an unpleasant diplomatic incident. That's what it is. We had reason to believe that the life of a very valuable Russian subject, Count Sergius Mihailovitch Macdonald, was in great danger. We were upon the battleship *Marie Nikolaevna*, which is temporarily the Russian Imperial yacht. What is more natural than in our anxiety to protect Sergius Mihailovitch, who is the spoilt child, as all the world knows, of the Russian Court—what is more natural than that we should land half a park of field-guns and plant them in front of the house in which he happens to be. It is surely not our fault if, because the guns stand in front of your ministry and because the Government Palace happens to be in front of the ministry, the guns should point towards the Government Palace. If Your Majesty feels insulted, as undoubtedly Your Majesty

is insulted, Your Majesty's Foreign Minister will to-morrow make proper representation to our Foreign Ministry, and will discover that the proper person to complain to is not the Imperial Foreign Ministry, but the Field-Gun Department of the Admiralty, who will then refer Your Majesty's Ministry to the Russian Imperial Home Office. So that, at the end of thirty-seven months, Your Majesty will receive a proper apology from the proper quarter, unless in the meantime Your Majesty sees fit to declare war upon the Empire of all the Russias . . ."

He began to fan himself with his cocked hat.

"Phew!" he exclaimed, "it's extraordinarily hot! Sergius Mihailovitch, my good fellow, knock the top off a bottle of champagne, and explain to His Majesty that everything is perfectly in order. And then introduce me to Marie Feodorovna, the Duchess of Batalha. I intend to be her godfather, if you will permit it."

The young King remained, however, singularly angry. As there was no particular reason for Sergius Mihailovitch to be present at the baptism, he remained with the King alone in the room with the banquet, which now had upon its floor a great quantity of broken glass; for the Grand Duke in toasting Lady Aldington had insisted that they should throw six bottles of champagne and all their drinking glasses on to the stone floor. This was the proper custom. The young King looked moodily out of the window.

"By God!" he exclaimed, "I wish the republican soldiers would blow the heads off every one of those rotten Russians!"

Sergius Mihailovitch didn't, of course, like the guns being there. It seemed to spoil the clean neatness of his scheme. But there wasn't anything that he could do or say, for the Grand Duke had acted with an impeccable diplomatic correctitude.

"But dear Dom Pedro," he said, "that's the sort of thing that has to happen. You must understand that the Grand Duke has really a very deep affection for me. That's the only way to look at it."

"But hang it all, Mac," the boy exclaimed, "he hasn't half the affection for you that I have. But I wouldn't go landing half a park of guns on Russian soil . . ."

Macdonald suddenly laughed. "Wouldn't you?" he said. "Wouldn't you land guns on Russian soil if there was a revolution and I was in danger and you wanted to protect me? It wouldn't be a very regular thing to do, but I hope you'd do it. It's the sort of thing I had hoped you'd do. It's what one would expect of you."

"How could you be such a fool!" the King exclaimed suddenly. "Of course it's what I'd do."

"Well, then," Macdonald said, "that's all that Nicholas Alexandrovitch has done."

The King wavered for a minute. He was looking at the guns, for any object of machinery fascinated him.

"By Jove," he exclaimed suddenly, "I don't believe those guns have got any breech-blocks!"

Macdonald opened the window and called out to the officer in charge of the guns:

"Hi you, you there! Where are your breech-blocks?"

The officer was drinking champagne from a very long glass.

"Good God!" he grumbled. "What's this? Who are you?"

"I am Sergius Mihailovitch Macdonald," Macdonald said, "aide-de-camp to his Imperial Majesty; and I want to know what the devil you've done with your breech-blocks?"

"Breech-blocks!" the officer grumbled. "What are breech-blocks? I don't know what breech-blocks are."

The guns are guns. They're what we've got. I don't know anything about breech-blocks."

Macdonald had talked in French, so that the King should understand him. And then the King began to laugh.

"That's it," Macdonald said; "that's typical of it. Now, have you any more to say?"

"I'm blest if I have," the King said.

"You won't," Macdonald said, "have to make any representations to any foreign officer. Those guns aren't guns. They're just decoration. Those sailors aren't troops, they haven't even got their side-arms on. That's it, you see. Even when the Admiral Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Navy tries to get up a diplomatic incident he can't really do it. It's all all right."

The King remained regarding the guns with a fascinated glance.

"It's the most extraordinary thing in the world!" he said. "It's really most extraordinary!"

Macdonald sat down and fell into a long reverie. A great many noises began to come from the street, but he didn't pay much attention. He was really very tired. The President with his daughters and the Countess Macdonald drove back to the palace. The republican troops surrounded his old landau. When he came in front of the ministry he sent a footman to ask the officer in charge of the guns who they were and what they were doing. The officer was by this time quite drunk enough to be sensible. He replied that the Grand Duke had landed the guns to protect a Russian subject, who was then in the ministry. The Russian imperial yacht was lying in the harbour. The Russian subject in the ministry had been fired upon.

That was all that was needed to put the President, who was of a very academic turn of mind, into a violent rage. He ran up to the ministerial rooms and suddenly appeared on the balcony.

"Brothers!" he shouted down to the troops, who to the number of three hundred and twenty were massed along the steps of the palace. "Brothers!" he said, "you are dogs! You are the mad swine of Galilee. Above us floats the sacred tricolour of the republic. From under its folds you have spat musket fire upon the first of our commandments, which bids us deal hospitably with all foreigners. Now, in the name of my sacred office, I command you to offer violence to no man. You know very well the compact we have made with these enemies of the republic. At the present moment our show of force is overwhelming, so it was till, swine as you are, you broke the laws of hospitality. Now it is all over with us. Upon this house, the sacred Temple of the Republican Justice, there are pointed such engines of destruction that with one spit from their filthy mouths they can blow to pieces the last vestige of liberty in this unhappy land."

"That man appears to be mad," the King said. "Or is it only this sunlight, the wine of the south, that makes us all drunk?"

Macdonald smiled suddenly. "No, it's only the dark forest," he said.

But the King exclaimed: "It isn't dark. Look at all the sunlight."

Great crowds coming from the bull-fight were pouring into the plaza, and perceiving the President upon the balcony they began to howl and moan rhythmically. The whole place was full of men, and street boys even crawled over the Russian guns. And then an acolyte came to ask Macdonald to come to his own wedding. The King would not be present, because he was a Roman Catholic, but he was ready to sign the protocol of the wedding after it had taken place. The only hitch in the ceremony itself came from Mr. Dexter. He strolled into the small back room that had been turned into a chapel with his hands in his

pockets, and an immense cigar in his mouth. He had been walking round the town, and had only reached the ministry with some difficulty. His cigar very much irritated the Archbishop of Nicomesia, who interrupted his extremely beautiful intoning to say, in a harsh voice, that this was the House of God, and not a place for a man to make a beast of himself in.

And as Mr. Dexter did not understand him, the Grand Duke pulled the enormous cigar from his mouth and threw it into the Holy Water font. After that it all went very quietly.

Then came the banquet, at which, of course, were the little lampreys of the Don. The Grand Duke was extremely affable, and he offered Macdonald four fingers of his hand to shake, because, as he explained, Macdonald had now become the reigning Duke of Batalha and Viceroy of North Galizia. Then he kissed Macdonald three times on each cheek, and he explained that each kiss represented a million pounds sterling which he, the Grand Duke, stood to make out of the revolution by speculation, bets, and investments with the American Company. Then he kissed Lady Aldington's hand, and he explained that although he was a little drunk, which was quite unusual with him, but excusable on such a happy occasion, when the spoilt baby of the Russian Court was really being spoilt by fortune and getting more than he deserved, though by enabling the Grand Duke to make some millions he had for once done something useful in the world—although he, the Grand Duke, was a little drunk, he was not so drunk as to forget that English ladies were rather prudish, otherwise he would have kissed her too upon both cheeks.

"Yes, I don't think I particularly want you to do that," Lady Aldington said.

And the Grand Duke grumbled that he remembered to have heard it said that the Duchess of Batalha had once

said of him that he wasn't respectable enough to call upon.

"So that you see," he said sardonically, "I've got a royal memory if I haven't got anything else."

Suddenly Macdonald looked at his watch. It was a quarter to two. He whispered in his wife's ear :

"You'll have to excuse me. I've got to go out."

She said : "Where to ?"

And he answered : "To the palace."

She said : "Oh no," and put her hand over her heart. But he was gone.

The King came after him. They pushed their way, both laughing a little, through the immense crowd. There were Russian sailors who smelt of smoke, and Galizians who smelt of garlic. The King was uproariously happy. He kissed three old women upon their cheeks and shouted into their ears, "I am your King." But the crowd was so dense, and all the Galizians were so tall, that they could hardly see where they were going. But one man and another helped them.

There was an enormous roaring at half a dozen windows round the plaza. Newspaper placards were being hung out bearing the words : "Proclamation of Dom Pedro in Batalha." The King kept pointing to these, and exclaiming :

"That's me ! that's me !" It is very probable that he would have got shot, but the soldiers were all jammed up in the crowd.

The inside of the palace was as still as the grave and as silent and as cool. The grey plaster of the corridors was falling off in places, and it smelt all very earthy. An officer led them to the ministerial chamber. The President was sitting there alone. He said harshly :

"Who are you ?"

And Macdonald answered :

"I am the Duke of Batalha, and I have the honour to introduce you to your King."

The President said sharply :

"No, I am the ruler of this country. I will never resign."

Macdonald pulled the revolver out of his hip-pocket. The President was a very obese man, with a pasty face and with black whiskers. He sat inertly in a red velvet chair looking into the muzzle of the revolver.

"I am afraid I must shoot you," Macdonald said, "unless you will acknowledge that this is overwhelming force. It was agreed that you would resign if you came face to face with overwhelming force."

"No, that is not overwhelming force," the President said. "It is force that will annihilate me, but it will not kill my country. I will resign when you show me that force."

"Will you take my word for it," Macdonald said, "that a first-class battleship with eight hundred men is in the harbour?"

"No, I will not take your word for it," the President said. "Ten minutes ago I telephoned to ask if the battleship was there, and they said that she was not yet in the harbour. Now they do not answer any more on the telephone."

"I am afraid that I must shoot you," Macdonald said, "in order to show your dead body to the people if you will not go to the window and announce your resignation."

"I will not do it," the President answered—"not until the battleship is there. That was our agreement. I will not resign one minute before the force is overwhelming." He sank lower and lower in his chair, his pale eyes gazing into the barrel of the pistol.

"You will not shoot that old fat man," the King said suddenly. "I don't want to see him shot."

A folding-door behind the President's back opened for a minute, and a girl's face peered round the leaf of the door.

Macdonald slipped the revolver under the table.

"Tell them to go away," he said to the President. "We are talking business."

The President nodded his fat head. "Go away, Chiquita," he said. "We are talking business."

"You had better say your prayers. In two minutes," Macdonald said.

The girl's face had gone, but there were loud sobs coming from behind the door.

"I don't understand," the King said querulously, "why you want to shoot this old fat man. I don't want to see it done!"

"I do not say my prayers," the President said. "I am an atheist."

"Majesty," Macdonald explained to the King, "I do not want to shoot this man, but otherwise he will never resign, and there will be a great deal of bloodshed in the square. I do not doubt that the *Trogoff II* is in the harbour. But nothing will convince this man, and if this man will not announce his resignation to the troops in two minutes, when it will be on the stroke of two, or if we do not show this man's dead body to the troops, the troops will fire upon the people. There is no way of showing this man the *Trogoff II*. So there is no way but to shoot him."

The King hung his head. "I would almost rather not be the King than have him shot!" he said.

"It is too late for that," Macdonald answered. "This man is a brave man, but many hundreds of men as brave will have to die if the troops begin to shoot on account of this man's obstinacy." He looked at the President. "When the palace clock strikes two," he said, "I must shoot you."

The President stammered : " Vaya, it is your duty."

There came a quaking, muttering sound. Macdonald imagined that one of the girls had fallen to the ground in a faint behind the door. A deadly silence fell upon the crowd outside. The sunlight was extraordinarily bright, and it was as still as the inside of a church. Macdonald's finger pressed slowly on the trigger of the revolver. His eyes were fascinated by the fat man's pale pupils and by his pallid forehead at the place where the bullet would go in.

There was a sharp snap from over their heads. The President grunted suddenly with his eyes upon the window. Macdonald threw up his hand, and the bullet from the revolver knocked the nose off a plaster figure of Justice that stood behind the presidential chair. A cloth of green, white, and yellow stripes had dropped on to the balcony with half a flagstaff attached to it.

Macdonald said : " My God ! "

There came again a quaking, grunting noise.

" That drunken idiot ! " Macdonald said. He looked at the President . . . " I have the honour to inform you," he said, " that a shell from a thirteen-inch gun on the first-class battleship the *Trogoff II* has broken your flagstaff in two."

Commander Grant of the *Trogoff II* was firing his three shots. But the other two were directed good and true at the Flagstaff-Hill behind the town.

The President sat for a long minute with his head hanging forward. Then he pulled himself out of his chair and staggered towards the balcony.

" You'd better go behind him," Macdonald said to the King.

The President took Dom Pedro by the wrist. They heard him whisper in a sick, ironical voice :

" Sirs, I here present to you . . . "

He was parodying the English Coronation Service, which he had read with great disgust six months before. But they did not hear any more of his voice, because the cheering was so loud. Then he shook his fist at the clear blue sky.

IV

WHEN Mr. Pett woke it was very black night, and by pressing the head of his repeater he discovered that it was a quarter to eleven. He had slept for fourteen hours. That showed that he had been very much overwrought.

There was not a sound to be heard on the ship and it was entirely in darkness. He switched on the light in his cabin. He felt cool, calm, and very well. There was not a sound to be heard on the ship, but through his porthole he could see reflected on the dark waters of the harbour sudden flashes of light, and he could hear sharp crackling sounds. He made his way up the companion and on to the deck. There was no light on the ship at all, but all over the sky, close at hand and far away, there were the dropping stars of rockets, and from the Signal Hill behind the town there went up a murky glare of light. Mr. Pett recognised it for a bonfire. He went down the gangway on to the quay. It was very deserted and dark, but he found an old man sitting upon the lowest of a pyramid of barrels—some sort of watchman. The old man had practically no English; all he could say was "God save the King!" which he had no doubt learnt from the crews of the English ships. Mr. Pett had no Galizian, but he realised very well that the counter-revolution must have succeeded. He returned to the ship thinking hard.

He couldn't get away from the fact that he didn't come

very well out of the whole matter, but he didn't care very much. He remembered that in the end he was really a philosophic writer, and it affected him rather more as a scientific fact than as a personal detail. He would be able to describe in a future book exactly how a man of genius behaved when it came to action. His stomach had betrayed him. That was what you had to expect, because thought had deprived his stomach of blood and taken it to the brain.

And suddenly Mr. Pett felt a warm admiration for Sergius Mihailovitch. There was no doubt that Macdonald had carried off this affair extremely well. No, there wasn't any getting away from it. And, indeed, Mr. Pett's admiration for Lady Aldington having died a natural death—her ladyship had on board a very pretty, pert, and vulgar lady's maid who had captured Mr. Pett's vagrant attentions—Mr. Pett began to see that everything had worked out in a satisfactory and scientific manner. It really supported his own theories exactly, for in the end Macdonald, with Emily Aldington and Kintyre, belonged to the ruling classes. You couldn't get away from it. It was an authentic fact; they worked in that way really without thinking of it. He remembered how Macdonald had protected the poor girl on the top of the 'bus whilst he was humming a tune. That, after all, was how the ruling classes ought to behave.

He went slowly back along the ship, turning on the electric lights on the main-mast down the principal deck, down the saloon way, down the companion. On the great dark yacht he left a little trail of light to mark his passage. What he had to decide was, how to act with exact correctness as became an English gentleman, because, if he hadn't got the ruling tradition in his own blood he hoped to transmit that habit of mind to his sons and their children. He hoped that he was going to found a ruling house. [That

would be in the proper fitness of things. He supposed that the King of Galizia would give him a title, because it was just a mark ; a visible sign to the world that one belonged to the ruling classes.

He decided that what he would have to do was to dress himself in his evening clothes and to go to the palace. He would felicitate the King and the Queen-Mother in three words of proper respect. He would congratulate Lady Aldington warmly, and to Macdonald he would make a perfectly sincere speech of extreme admiration. He was going to act with perfect correctness to the others, and with extreme generosity to Macdonald. He went into the saloon to get a drink of soda water, for he felt extremely thirsty.

The idea of Macdonald was extremely strong upon him. It was so strong that it seemed odd. He seemed to remember a chain of Macdonald's hopefulnesses, generousities, delicacies, and attempts to be of service. He could almost see the smiling, rather tender face. He remembered their first meeting. Mr. Pett had been speaking at an assembly of the Putney Fabian Society. He had spoken with extreme passion about equal opportunities for all. At that time he had been a booking-office clerk. The meeting had been breaking up, and then, pushing through the departing people, there had come this long, fair, enthusiastic Russian, overwhelming him with praises of his speech. . . .

At that date Mr. Pett had considered Macdonald to be weak and flexible. He had discovered him also to be enormously rich, and, with quite a deliberate purpose, Mr. Pett had set to work to use Macdonald's riches for his own advancement. He didn't in the least repent of it ; it had been exactly the right thing to do. Mr. Pett had made himself famous. Macdonald, owing to Mr. Pett's exhortations, had found exactly the right billet. Without

Macdonald he himself would have been nothing ; without himself Macdonald would have remained negligible and purposeless. He remembered very vividly how strong and how determined Macdonald had been of late. His last interview with Sergius Mihailovitch had been in the garage, when Macdonald had insisted on Mr. Pett's writing that letter of apology. And Mr. Pett laughed to himself to remember that affair. He was laughing to think how well Macdonald had done it. He was not particularly ashamed of himself. He had not come very well out of the blackmailing incident ; but then that sort of thing was not what he was calculated to do well.

It wasn't really his sort of business. He had been making experiences for himself. And he had made the experience. Fortunately he had done no harm at all, and in any emotional experience of that sort in the future he was perfectly certain that he would act not like a blackguard and little cockney cur, but like an English gentleman. That was the only way one could rise from the ranks—by learning how to act well.

With himself Mr. Pett was extremely frank, and indeed he was really very practical in his determination to learn how to behave well. The only thing that he really regretted in the whole matter was the way he had harangued the Marquis da Pinta and Dom Crisostomo Carrasco against Macdonald. And that he did not so much regret, because he had not really and personally meant anything more than a nonsensical rodomontade. But it left a sort of uneasy sting in his consciousness. He couldn't get away from the feeling that that Dom Carrasco really meant to shoot Macdonald in the back. He even had an uneasy feeling over his own loins as if a revolver bullet were lodging itself there.

He was just pottering about, thinking and trying to find a soda-water syphon. But there wasn't one in the saloon

at all. Then he found his way into a steward's pantry—a sort of cupboard giving out of the saloon. Here, sure enough, was a syphon. He found also a very long fragile glass, and then he noticed an ice-locker. The ice was nearly all melted, but he got enough of small flakes to make an agreeable tinkling in his long tumbler. He squirted the soda-water into it, and was just about to drink when he heard a slight noise in the saloon. He looked out of the cupboard. The Countess Macdonald was standing at the head of the dining-table. He drank his soda water, and then came out with the glass in his hand.

"So you're back already," the Countess said. She was extraordinarily pale for her. "I suppose the others will be coming soon?" she continued. "I followed you along the deck when you lighted the lights."

"That's all right," Mr. Pett said. "Have some soda water?"

"No; I don't want any," she answered. "Give me the glass."

He handed the glass to her and she set it down upon the table. He noticed that she had already laid there a Galizian country basket made of rush work. She said:

"Sit down. I want to address some remarks to you. When will the others be back?"

"I don't want to sit down," Mr. Pett said. "I've got to dress and go to the palace. I don't know where the others are. I've been asleep."

He was really very anxious to get to the palace, he was so dominated by the absurd idea that Dom Carrasco would shoot Macdonald in the back. He felt himself extremely full of affection for Sergius Mihailovitch. He wanted to make such a speech to him in the presence of the whole Court that Dom Carrasco should be convinced of what a fine fellow Macdonald was.

"Sit down," the Countess exclaimed rather more peremptorily.

She took from the rush basket a revolver, a long envelope, and a little bottle of yellow fluid.

"You had better sit down," she said.

Mr. Pett felt the strongest possible disinclination to sit down, but he took a chair at the table just facing her. She had an engrossed and perfectly quiet manner. In the long, wide-mouthed glass there were still some fragments of ice. She emptied them on to the red velvet table cover. Then she uncorked the bottle of yellow fluid. She poured it into the wide glass, and to Mr. Pett's nervous eyes it appeared to bubble and to smoke.

"What's that?" Mr. Pett exclaimed.

"Vitriol," she answered. She looked at Mr. Pett calmly and resolutely. Then she placed the long envelope over the mouth of the glass. "You can't throw it so well out of a bottle," she explained. "This large glass was exactly what I wanted."

Mr. Pett exclaimed: "Good God!"

She looked at him with the calm satisfaction of a person who is at once a just judge and a passionless executioner.

"I've debated it with the President's eldest daughter," she said. "She's a stupid weak fool, but she agrees with me. I have told her the whole story of this man."

"Sergius Mihailovitch?" Mr. Pett answered.

"Sergius Mihailovitch Macdonald, Duke of Batalha," she said passionlessly.

"So they're married?" Mr. Pett asked.

"Yes," she answered, "*they're* married. But don't think that I am going to revenge my private wrongs. You know me better than to think that. I have never wanted private revenge. I am here in the capacity of a public executioner. I have hated this man's detestable morals, not because they hurt me; they didn't hurt me. I am too proud to be hurt,

But it is his hateful and deleterious example that must be visited with the vengeance that it merits."

Again Mr. Pett ejaculated : " Good God ! "

" This envelope," the Countess continued, " contains an exact statement of my attitude. It relates the whole baseness of this man from beginning to end. I have written it out so plainly that I never can be misunderstood again. I have written it out because probably one of you will murder me when I shall have executed justice on this man. When he comes in at that door. . . ."

" He mayn't come in at that door," Mr. Pett said.

" Oh yes, he will," the Countess answered. " I have ascertained that there are no bedrooms ready at the palace. Sooner or later he must come here. And when he comes in at that door I shall cover him with this revolver so that he will not dare to move, and then I shall tell him what I think of him, and he will see the vitriol in the glass. And when I have talked enough I shall pour it over his face. I shall be perfectly calm. I shall keep the rest of you covered with this revolver, so that you won't dare to go to his assistance. And then, when the liquid has done its avenging work, I shall do my best to escape. I don't want to have to shoot myself. I'm not in the least afraid of death. But that would be too much like heroics. I may shoot him ? I don't know. That will depend on how I feel at the moment."

It came into Mr. Pett's head that this woman must be mad, and that you can generally defeat mad people by some petty stratagem. He stood up and said :

" Well, all this doesn't concern me. I've got to dress and go to the palace."

The Countess took up the revolver. Then she sat down, and resting her elbows upon the table to steady her aim, she pointed it straight at Mr. Pett's mouth.

" Oh no, I'm not mad," she said, " not in the least. I'm perfectly calm, you see ; my hands don't tremble at all,

though the revolver's rather heavy. If you attempt to go away I shall shatter your jaws with a bullet. It won't kill you? Why should I want to kill a worm like you? You're a dirty little member of the lower classes. You're an accomplice of the disgusting practices of this shameless man, just because you're a member of the lower classes, and you're only too glad to be taken up by these smart people on any kind of dishonourable terms. That's what you are! So I shan't kill you, but I shall shatter your jaw. You won't be able to play the informant then."

Mr. Pett looked at the door. He wished desperately to make a dash for it, in order to save Macdonald, but the dark muzzle seemed to paralyse him. He couldn't take his eyes away from it. A cold sweat prickled out all over his forehead, then he sat down again. And again he made a mental note of the way of the mind of a man of genius worked in such a situation. He was in an agony, but he knew that he had done all that could have been expected of him, and what worried him most at the moment was that he couldn't remember whether oil was the proper thing to apply to vitrol burns. He couldn't positively remember whether vitriol was an acid or an alkali, and whether oil would float it off the skin? He knew that water was a very bad thing. And then suddenly he began to talk. Positively he felt himself such a cur that he hoped he would force this woman to shoot him. He said:

"The whole of the trouble comes from your being a member of the shopkeeping classes. That's what you are, a shopkeeper's daughter. That's what's in the blood; that's what's in the profession. Your father was a tailor. If a customer brought him cloth to make a suit of he would steal a yard and a half of cloth and justify himself because it was the custom of the trade; that's like you. You will take any advantage you can, and you will justify yourself because it's the custom of a person in your

position. That's all you care about. When Sergius Mihailovitch has been generous to you, you've despised him, because you do not understand what generosity is. When Sergius Mihailovitch lost his affection for you, you upbraided him like a tradesman who sees a customer take his custom away and give it to another establishment. That's what you are, a product of tradespeople. The difference between you and gentlefolk like Macdonald—Good God!—the difference between both you and me and him is that we haven't got a spark of generosity in us. We've both conspired to injure that fine gentleman mortally. I'm ready to say that I'm Judas. But I'm ready to say too that all you've ever thought of in your life is the forty pieces of silver, of your own dirty personal vanity. We aren't either of us fit to loosen the shoe latches of Sergius Mihailovitch. That's how the world has always been. That is how it will always be.) If you manage to get your vitriol on to him, he'll still be fifty thousand fathoms above the heads of you and me. We're the lower classes, that's what we are, because we haven't got in the whole of our compositions a spark of generosity."

His voice was getting higher and higher, and suddenly it broke altogether. The Countess appeared to be listening to him with a polite attention. When he had definitely stopped speaking she began calmly :

"I'll admit that in a conventional sense vitriol is not a proper thing to use. It sounds vulgar. But I argued the matter very carefully with the President's daughter. We agreed that this man is entirely infamous. He is infamous in his private life ; his example would debauch the young of any nation. He is infamous in his public life. He has fought victoriously against the sacred cause of Freedom. And in all the principles of justice the implement used against an offender is roughly adjusted to his offence. A nobleman is hung with a silken rope, a common murderer

gets hemp ; a soldier is shot ; certain infamous felons are infamously flogged. Vitriol is the weapon of infamy because it makes both the criminal who uses it and his victim infamous. So I shall use it as an infamous implement against an infamous man. You will acknowledge that that is justice."

Terror and agony seized upon Mr. Pett. He heard sounds upon the deck : they became more numerous. There was a brushing footstep in the passage itself. The Countess's fingers closed calmly round the large glass ; she pushed the envelope off it with the muzzle of the revolver. Suddenly Mr. Pett screamed out :

" Sergius Mihailovitch, don't come in ! Don't come in, Sergius Mihailovitch, on peril of your life ! "

Then Mrs. Pett came in through the door. There was an extreme strangeness about the aspect of Mrs. Pett. She appeared to be bluish in the shadows of her face ; her outline was oddly stiff ; she tottered a little as she walked over the carpet, and her eyes never winked, they were perfectly stiff. She came in and sat down at the table. She passed her hand over her face as if her hair had fallen across it. She looked curiously at the ice that was melting in little pools upon the table-cloth, then she said without any expression at all :

" Sergius Mihailovitch is dead. They've shot him in the back."

They were quite silent for fully three minutes. Then suddenly the Countess flung the revolver on the floor. It thumped heavily on the carpet.

" So may all traitors die ! " she said. " I could have predicted that that would be his end."

" No, you couldn't," Mrs. Pett said drearily. " You have had nothing to do with it. Not you. I loved Sergius Mihailovitch ; when I used to see him playing with children, I wished he'd been the father of mine."

Suddenly Mr. Pett began to whimper like a child crying. They couldn't make any sense of his words. He tore at his collar to get it undone, but the linen was too thick. And he forgot about the stud. He went on whimpering and whimpering. . . .

The Countess was trying to think of something effective to say. She could think of nothing, but she was convinced that she was the central figure of that scene. She had been dramatically avenged.

Then Kintyre came in. His face was very tired and his eyes were red. He sat down at the table; from outside they heard the gurgle of the falling tide. There fell upon them a dreary silence that comes after a death-struggle. A steward in his shirt-sleeves walked across the saloon to the closet. He came back with a half-filled bottle of brandy and went away. Some one threw down a coil of rope on the deck overhead, but they were all too dull even to start.

Mr. Dexter came in. He was smoking an enormous cigar that he had just begun. He tiptoed across the room and sat down at the far end of the table as if he desired companionship and yet did not wish to intrude upon a family in grief. He thought of saying: "Mamie's real ill, and they've sent me away," so as to explain his presence; but he didn't say it. He took some notes out of his pocket and began to study them—a number of numbers in pencil. He found that he could not read them because his eyes were blurred. He thought he was responsible for the death of Macdonald because he had found the greater part of the money for the scheme.

The Countess moved over to his end of the table. She could not see any signs of grief upon his face, so she imagined that he might be the proper person to talk to about her wrongs. But he did not look up from his notes.

At last Kintyre asked Mrs. Pett: "What was the

name of the man who did it? Have they caught him?"

"No," Mrs. Pett said. "No one is to be caught at all. Didn't you hear his last words?"

"I thought they were '*The dark forest*,'" the Duke said.

"Oh, that was to Lady Aldington," Mrs. Pett said. "He looked at her and he smiled, and he just whispered: '*The dark forest*.' But I was thinking of what he said to the King."

"What did he say to the King?" the Duke asked.

Hearing conversation, the Countess moved over behind them.

"He was lying in the garden," Mrs. Pett said. "He had been walking there with the King to give him the last directions for the day. The man shot him from a dark clump of orange trees. Macdonald fell down. We were looking out of the upper window, Emily and I. She said just before that it was what she liked best in the world—to see her man doing things. That was the only speech of the sort that I've ever heard her say about him. She said it as if she didn't think anyone was listening—or perhaps she was thinking that I felt in the same way. It was beautifully cool, after the day had been so hot."

She looked at Kintyre and asked: "Where were you?"

"Oh, I wasn't in the palace at all," Kintyre said. "I was seeing to the unmooring of the *Trogoff II*. Macdonald insisted that I should get her off to-night for fear they should loot. She's a hundred miles away by now. What happened then?"

"Oh, we ran down," Mrs. Pett said. "Macdonald was lying there. At first he was in too great pain to speak at all. The King was holding up his head and crying out for some one to come and search the garden, but there was such a noise and disorder in the palace that no one came. It was rather up towards the end of the building, in the

dark where the trees are. Then a man came out of the orange bushes; he said that it was he that killed the traitor. A dark man in a long cloak. He spoke a little indistinctly, and the King was shouting out all the time, so he didn't hear. There was a little moonlight; we could see rather distinctly. You know how clear the nights are. Then Lady Aldington knelt down beside him. He'd been making bubbling noises with his mouth, or as if he were shivering. That was just the pain. And then the nerve exhaustion came—I don't know if you know anything about the spine—sensation ceases a minute or two after it's been injured. And Macdonald looked at Lady Aldington. 'Just excuse me a minute,' he said, 'I must talk to the King first.' She said: 'Ah! always the others first!' That was the only thing she said to-night. Then Macdonald said: 'Prop me up so that I can talk to the King,' and Lady Aldington lifted up his shoulders and the King knelt over him. . . . The man who had shot him was still looking down. 'Listen a minute, Pedrocito . . . ' Macdonald said: his voice was quite clear. I went and knelt beside Lady Aldington and helped her to hold him up. I've got his blood on the knees of my skirt. And then he said to the King: 'Listen, this is cancer of the spine. An old complaint with me. It's cancer of the spine. An old complaint with me. It's cancer of the spine, you understand.' The King said, 'No, no.' But Macdonald answered: 'These are my last words to you. I command you to recognise that it was cancer of the spine. The Galizian doctors aren't very good. No one knows what cancer is. It's a foreign body introducing itself somehow into the tissues.' I said, 'Good God, Sergius Mihailovitch, how can you talk like that! Think of Emily!' And then he said, 'My dear'—he said 'My dear' to me!—'I'm doing the best I can for Lady Aldington. I'm trying to keep my figure clean for her memory,

it's very urgent ! ' The man who had shot him said : ' No, it is not cancer of the spine. I shot you.' Then Sergius Mihailovitch looked up at him. ' My friend,' he said, ' don't boast about it. Don't put your personal credit before the credit of the King. No doubt I die of a necessary disease. Let it go at that. You don't want to discredit the King by a trial at the opening of his reign. That's what's got to be avoided.' Then he spoke to me. Yes, he said to me—' Anne, you're the coolest person here.' That was true, I think, because the King was crying so that he seemed to have lost his senses. He said, ' Understand, Anne, there mustn't be any trial. I shall be dead in three minutes ; these are my last words. There mustn't be bloodshed on the King's threshold.' I said : ' But there has been bloodshed.' But he didn't listen. He turned his head into Lady Aldington's lap and he said : ' The dark forest ! The dear dark Forest.' Of course he may have said something more, but I didn't hear, because I took the King away and tried to explain to him what Macdonald wanted. Then Lady Aldington said that he was dead, and we all helped to carry him into the palace."

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